

## July 1 – Friday – Kellia Reading – Deuteronomy 12:1-7

**Divine Truth: Deuteronomy 12:1-7, especially vs. 5:** “You shall seek the place the Lord your God chooses, out of all your tribes, to put His name and to be called on there; and you shall go and seek Him there.” Christ declares, “Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice” (Jn 18:37). Among Orthodox Christians, some are fully attuned to divine truth, some partially so, and some barely. Our faith calls us to the struggle of knowing and embracing Truth Himself in worship and in all of life. However, the numbing effects of this world often seduce us into negligence and mindlessness, which Saint John Climacus describes as “ignorance of compunction, a door to despair . . . which give birth to loss of the fear of God” (*Ladder of Divine Ascent* 18.2, p. 124).

We must realize that many “truths” are promoted, even pressed upon us, for unthinking adoption. Bullied by a welter of competing ideas and demands, it is easy to lose our way. Be alert against indifference to divine truth, for our secular culture is actually resurgent paganism. Its idolatry is akin to the Canaanite cults that spread across the Promised Land prior to the coming of the ancient people of God: indulgent and heartless, but crafted to appear superficially attractive.

Faced with the contemporary idolatrous worship of present-day secularism, our task is to name its idols, identifying the shrines where they are honored (vs. 2), and recognize “their altars . . . images . . . [and] gods” (vs. 3). The key to this critical spiritual task is to know and apply God’s truth, which is the light that exposes the debased “priests” and devotees of suave, contemporary neo-paganism. Be attentive!

Let us name a few of these secular idols: 1) situational ethics, which rejects God’s holy morality; 2) the god of pleasure, who invites us to attend his “do-it-if-it-feels-good” festivities and seminars; 3) the cult of empty science, which assumes that the miraculous is impossible since it cannot be predicted, controlled, or measured; 4) spiritualities that exclude God; and, above all else, 5) toleration of all lifestyles as equal.

The media, many universities, and certain other groups speak out in support of those who advance such lies and distortions. They dismiss the outcry of our clergy, who call their self-serving appeals out-of-step with the *genuine truths* of God’s word.

Be like Moses and speak only divine truth. First and foremost, “destroy all the places” of secular worship – the altars and the “images of their gods” – and “abolish their name” *out of your own soul* (vss. 2,3). Modern paganism may be more diffuse than the Canaanite cults, but it is no less insidious and damaging.

Heed Saint Augustine, who faced a culture like our own in the waning years of pagan Rome: “They say that we are enemies of their idols [their lies]. So be it; may God give them all into our power, as He has already given us what we have broken down. For I say this, beloved, that you may not attempt to overcome those which it is not lawfully in your power to overcome. . . . When the power has not been given us, do not do it; when it is given, do not neglect it” (“Sermons on New Testament Lessons,” *ACCS*, vol. 3, p. 295). “Honor all people. . . . Fear God. Honor the king” (1 Pt 2:17).

Do not hesitate to speak and act, but always lawfully. Let no Orthodox Christian consider assassinating abortionists, bombing television towers or cutting the cables of stations that send out pornography. Do not put the torch to “adult” stores, schools, or universities where idolatrous lies abound. Our primary task is to cleanse our own and our children’s hearts, minds, and passions, to offer truth to our families and friends, and to live Christ’s holy truth so as to reveal its radiant beauty and life-giving power.

*Lead me in Thy truth and teach me, for Thou art God my Savior, on whom I wait.* – Troparion of Saint Metrophanes of Constantinople

## July 2 – Saturday – Kellia Reading – Deuteronomy 13:1-5

**Under God – True Prophets: Deuteronomy 13:1-5, especially vs. 5:** “You shall walk after the Lord your God and fear Him, and keep His commandments and obey His voice; you shall hold fast to Him.” Today there is widespread repudiation of the idea that the populace ought to live *under God*, and an even greater resistance to the notion that people should *walk after* His ways, “fear Him . . . keep His commandments . . . obey His voice . . . hold fast to Him.” Efforts to remove the phrase “one nation under God” from the pledge of allegiance and to forbid prayer and other religious expressions on public property have become commonplace. We are in a cultural struggle, without a doubt.

Orthodox Christians need to be aware of this mounting opposition to the faith, for the militant opponents of religious speech and action are determined to end every public expression of living under God. Their efforts are neither harmless nor the acts of eccentrics promoting a foreign ideology. These are false “prophet[s] or dreamer[s] of dreams” (vs. 4) with serious intent. Their aim is that we should “go and serve other gods” (vs. 3). They are devotees of another religion, placing supreme trust in the powers of this world. These prophets of the secular management of nature and society declare this to be the sole path to “the good life.” They acclaim *rational technology* as the sole sacred authority.

Over the next three days we will explore several teachings of the Prophet Moses that express his concern with false religion and cultural corruption. He knew that when a people, culture, and society live *under God*, a healthy and enduring national life follows. The evidence can be found in sanctified prophets, the proper use of wealth, and the presence of authorities that fear God.

As we read Moses’ warning against false prophets in verses 2-4, we must consider the role of the true prophet. We know that some men can produce signs and wonders and exhibit great insights even as they lead their followers to “serve other gods” (vs. 3). God’s standard, however, is the prophet who is sanctified, true, and anointed by the Lord Himself.

Moses, a true prophet, acknowledges that there are those who produce miracles and wonders and even predict the future, but he warns against relying on those tangible skills as valid measures for judging whether a prophet is true or false. Given the complex forces that God has woven into His creation, a person may, through study and practice, harness and manipulate those powers for one’s own purposes with an apparent clairvoyance.

The Creator of the universe is capable of mighty signs and wonders, either directly or through His saints. Over the centuries (and even in this *scientific* age), the evidence reveals that God is among us. The clairvoyance of Jesus moves Nathanael to call Him “the Son of God . . . the King of Israel.” To this acclamation the Lord replies, “You will see greater things than these” (Jn 1:49, 50). Most of the miracles the Lord Jesus performed were done out of compassion, or to illumine His disciples concerning Himself and salvation. His saints have repeated many of the same miracles. Miracles are part of the creation of God.

Do not be dazzled by abilities and wonders, but learn that true prophets “walk after the Lord your God and fear Him, and keep His commandments and obey His voice” (Dt 13:4). In 1937, Stalin purged the top leaders of the Communist Party. This act proved unbearable for many of his loyal followers but, as Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn observed, “that is the price a man pays for entrusting his God-given soul to human dogma” (*The Gulag Archipelago II*, p. 327). Always trust in Christ and His Church and hold fiercely to Him and His words, for He is the Life-giver.

*O holy prophets of God, as ye did bind the heavens by your pure words, and teach us to love and fear God, loosen our iniquities by interceding before the Lord to save our souls.* – Prayer of the Feast of Prophet Elijah

## July 3 – Sunday – Kellia Reading – Deuteronomy 15:7-15, Tone 2

**Under God, continued – Assisting the Poor: Deuteronomy 15:7-15, especially vs. 11:** “For the poor will never cease from the land; therefore, I command you to do this word which says, ‘You shall surely open your hands to your brother, to your poor and needy in your land.’” Moses instructs us on God’s requirement for aiding those in need: borrowers, the poor, and the distressed, as well as those in our debt and service. In so doing, we are to pay close attention to our own hearts before the Lord, which comes as no surprise to an Orthodox Christian. The main point is that the inward attitude of the heart should remain uppermost among our concerns.

As a prophet of God, Moses sets forth a series of six contrasting states which may apply to the condition of our hearts: 1) hardened or submissive; 2) iniquitous or pure; 3) covetous or generous; 4) grudging or willing; 5) miserly or liberal; 6) forgetful or mindful. He alludes to these conditions as he describes the ways in which we respond to others in need, whether through making loans, giving charity, or providing for the welfare of those in our debt or employ.

The first commandment in assisting those in need is this: “You shall not harden your heart, nor shut your hand from your poor brother” (vs. 7). By hardening the heart against those in need, we forgo our submissiveness to God, who cares for those in distress and privation. The Prophet Job, speaking of the devil (“Leviathan,” “Serpent”), describes “his heart . . . as hard as a stone, and it stands like an unyielding anvil” (Job 41:16). May we not perish in the sea of eternal death like Pharaoh, who refused to heed Moses (Ex 8:19).

Moses also warns us not to have “a hidden thought in your heart, a transgression of the law” (Dt 15:9). The impure heart craves the good things of this life and becomes attached to material comfort, disregarding the condition of the soul. There is danger in wicked ideas that steal into our heart and whisper against *losing* earthly pleasures. If you resist providing assistance to others because of your own comfort, look to see if you have lost godly purity.

The wise Solomon likewise cautions that “an envious man hastens to be rich” (Prv 28:24). Saint Ephraim discerns that envy distorted Cain’s vision of reality, leading him to murder the righteous Abel. Corrosive sin caused those hired early in the day to murmur against God for doing good to those hired late (Mt 20:15). Only when the heart is purified does the noetic eye begin to see through the Lord’s eyes, becoming filled with His generosity.

A grudging attitude toward our needy brethren surely closes us off from God’s blessing. Yet when we are willing to give, Moses promises that “the Lord your God will bless you in all your works and in everything to which you put your hand” (Dt 15:10).

Similarly, miserliness of heart prevents us from supplying another *liberally* out of our own resources (vs. 14). Heed the prophet’s admonition and cultivate the virtue of liberality in all things spiritual and material, especially to those within the household of faith.

Finally, the Lord our God commands us to *remember* our own struggle as slaves – and the corresponding redemption that Christ won for us on the Cross. God prompts Moses to call upon the ancient people of God to remember that “you were a servant [*oiketes*, slave] in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God redeemed you from that place” (vs. 15). Only through prayer and God’s grace can we hope to maintain mindfulness and freedom in the heart.

*O God, Who hath provided us with all that we now possess: grant us grace that we may honor Thee with our substance, remembering the account that we must one day give.* – Episcopal Book of Common Prayer

**July 4 – Monday – Wisdom of Solomon 3:1-9**  
**First Reading at Vespers for Saint Athanasios the Athonite**

**Saint Athanasios the Athonite: *Wisdom of Solomon, 3:1-9, especially vs. 6:*** “He tested them like gold in a furnace and accepted them as a whole burnt offering.” The *Evergetinos* quotes “an elder [who] said that it should cause no wonder that a man can become an angel, for we have before us for our enjoyment glory equal to the glory of the angels. And this glory has been promised to the combatants by Him who established the prize” (Book 1, p. 48). Athanasios, founder of Great Lavra on Mount Athos, pursued Christ’s glory through the angelic life from his youth until his death, leading countless others on that path of offering themselves to God as *whole burnt offerings*.

The records concerning Athanasios’ life confirm that he was ever in “the hand of God” (vs. 1). Baptized Abraham by his devout parents in Trebizond, where he was born, he was left destitute at an early age when his parents died; but a high-ranking army officer cared for him and removed him to Constantinople, where he was educated. In his play with other boys in the great capital of the Byzantine Empire, he was “beloved by all contemporaries for his meekness and humility. In their childish games, they appointed one of themselves to be emperor, another commander and so forth. Abraham was always chosen abbot, as if in prophecy” (*Prologue from Ochrid* vol. 3, p. 21).

After his completing his schooling in Constantinople, the young man “retired to Mount Kyminas in Bithynia, where he lived in asceticism as a disciple of the famous Michael Maleinos,” a seasoned elder from one of the great aristocratic families of Anatolia. In Bithynia, Abraham was tonsured into monasticism with the name Athanasios.

After some years, his desire to enter deeper into the angelic life led Athanasios to moved to Mount Athos. At that time eremitic monasticism dominated the Holy Mountain. Thus Athanasios was “tested” as a solitary “like gold in a furnace and accepted . . . as a whole burnt offering” (vs. 6). Saint Nikolai of Zicha records that many “temptations were visited upon Athanasios, from demons and from men, but he . . . resisted and overcame them all by his immense humility and unceasing prayer to the living God.”

His great test came when other monks began to gather around him. Finally, in AD 963, he built a large coenobitic monastery on the southern tip of the Athonite peninsula which was named the Great Lavra. Its founding was supported by Emperor Nicephoros Phocas, a friend and admirer of Athanasios. The community was modeled after the monastery of Studion in Constantinople, founded in the ninth century under a typikon that detailed the corporate “worship, manual work, and study . . . tempered by a moderation in the practice of asceticism” (Oblensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth*, p. 382).

However, the new community on Athos was not welcomed at first by the hermits who had lived on the Holy Mountain since the fourth century. They appealed to the Emperor, but because of the Great Lavra’s imperial support their appeals were of no avail, “because grace and mercy are upon His elect” (vs. 9).

To “the eyes of the undiscerning” Athanasios and six of his monks “seemed to have died, and their departure was considered to be misfortune” (vs. 2). Yet God mercifully revealed to the abbot beforehand how he would die with the six. These monks went “to the top of a construction project to help the workmen. The dome collapsed, and they fell. Five were killed at once, and the saint died three hours later” (*Great Horologion*, p. 532), but God “found them worthy of Himself” (vs. 5).

*O Athanasios, dwelling with the angels, beseech Christ to grant great mercy to our souls.* – Aposticha of the Feast of Saint Athanasios

**July 5 – Tuesday – Wisdom of Solomon 5:15-6:3**  
**Second Reading at Vespers for Saint Athanasios the Athonite**

**All Who Rule, Attend: *Wisdom of Solomon 5:15-6:3, especially vs. 2:*** “Give ear, you that rule over multitudes, and take pride in yourself over a multitude of nations.” The American statesman Henry Clay, warned that “the arts of power” are used “in all countries and ages” by rulers “to conceal [their] own abuses and encroachments” (March 14, 1834 address to the U.S. Senate). Many centuries earlier, the Prophet Hanani warns King Asa of Judah that “the eyes of the Lord look over the whole earth and strengthen every heart that is loyal to Him” – and God brings wars on those who do “foolishly” (2 Chr 16:9). Let us heed these cautions personally, for they are directed to those who wield “lordship from the Most High” of any kind (Sol 6:3). The Lord holds everyone accountable for self-management, from the inmate in the narrowest prison cell to the ruler presiding with great power “over a multitude of nations” (vs. 2).

Solomon exalts the *righteous* as God’s best rulers (vss. 15-16) in the spiritual sense, for the Lord cares for and rewards them noetically, within their spirits and souls. He protects them and bestows kingly dignity through inner victories and defeats. He shelters “them with His right hand and [protects] them with His arm” (vs. 16). Among the righteous, Scripture names Zechariah and Elizabeth, Simeon, Joseph of Arimathea, John the Baptist, Elijah, Cornelius the centurion, and the publican of the parable. We ought to look for the righteous who are near and around us, since “he who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous” (1 Jn 3:7).

In this passage Solomon warns that wrath can suddenly be unleashed on the *senseless* (Wis 15:20) or, according to another translation, the *unwise*. The word in the original Greek conveys a seriously flawed perception, but God is never limited by what our frail senses can discern. He carefully searches out our hearts and works. He closely examines our inmost *plans* (vs. 3). Should He find us proud in relation to others (vs. 2), He will take up His full armor and even “turn His creation into weapons against His enemies” (vs. 18). The consequences for us will certainly be dire. Righteous and impartial in His judgment, the Lord our God will unleash “relentless wrath” against us (vs. 20).

Whenever we foolishly make the fatal choice to consort with the enemies of the Lord Most High, Solomon’s portrait of God offers a solemn warning. We may experience God as a zealous foe, since His breastplate (vs. 18) shields His absolute righteousness against the feeble rationalizations of men. His understanding and analysis remain utterly impenetrable against the clever defenses of human knowledge. May God forbid that we learn of His judgment against us in excruciating ways and come to know “His terrible swift sword.”

All who are familiar with the violence of thunderstorms know that there are mortal dangers in “flashes of lightning” when they “strike and leap to their object” (vs. 21) and in “hailstones full of anger.” Flash floods – whether of seawater or rushing rivers – will *wash over* dikes and embankments and vex us severely (vs. 22). We are reminded that the Holy Spirit winnows us in order to illumine as “a rushing mighty wind” (Acts 2:2) – and also to tear away our defenses and expose the confusion of sin and darkness in our souls.

Before God makes His *careful search* (Wis 6:3) of us, may we listen to Solomon’s wisdom and thoroughly examine every lordship bestowed on us by the Most High. There is yet time to purge the books of our souls so that they may be blessed at His review.

*Account me worthy to be lifted above my will’s wandering eye to see Thee as Thou art.* – Saint Isaac the Syrian

## July 6 – Wednesday – Wisdom of Solomon 4:7-15

### Third Reading at Great Vespers for Saint Athanasios the Athonite

**Discernment: *Wisdom of Solomon 4:7-15, especially vs. 8-9:*** “For old age is not honored for its length of existence, nor measured by its number of years; but discernment is gray hair for mankind, and a spotless life is the maturity of old age.” Today, surely, we are “living among sinners” (vs. 10) and amidst distortions and deceptions that blind our hearts to the light of Christ who “was made perfect . . . in a short time [and] fulfilled long years” (vs. 13). Through Solomon’s words the Lord seeks to give us godly discernment – to draw us out of evil’s snares “lest evil change [our] understanding or deceit deceive [our souls]” (vs. 11).

To gain discernment we must pray as David teaches: “In the morning shall I stand before Thee” (Ps 5:2). Elder Joseph the Hesychast advises us to “seek the One Who . . . is able to divide the waters from the waters . . . and . . . learn how to avoid delusion” (*Monastic Wisdom*, p. 188).

Next it is necessary for us to repent of iniquity, evil works, and the speaking of lies (Ps. 5:2-5), so that the corrupt things in us that stem “from a bitter root [are transformed] into sweet nourishment for the soul,” as Saint Nikitas Stithatos says (*Philokalia* vol. 4, p. 81).

Third, by the mercy of God, let us pray and worship until “the fear of [Him]” is fully awakened in us (Ps. 5:6). Elder Joseph continues, “A man . . . filled with grace, is always cautious, and never becomes overconfident or trusts in himself, but rather has constant fear throughout his life. . . .”

Fourth, we beseech the Lord to guide us “in the way of Thy righteousness” and to make our ways straight (Ps 5:7). In Saint Diadochos of Photiki’s words, righteousness leads noetically “upward towards the Sun of Righteousness and brings it into . . . boundless illumination” (*Philokalia* vol. 1, p. 254).

Fifth, we are to expose all vain and deceitful words, *devisings*, and ungodliness in order to “cast them out” (Ps 5:7-10). “When our mind is confined by . . . darkness from the enemy, then . . . leave off entirely every . . . reasoning, for we do not know the truth as long as our mind is not purified” (*Little Russian Philokalia* vol. 4, p. 125).

Sixth, we beg the Lord to dwell within us, that we may be glad in hope and “shall ever rejoice” (Ps 5:11). The Lord draws us away from evil, envy, deceit, and “a whirling of desire” (Wis 4:11-12) that we may gain godly discernment. As the psalmist says, “much peace have they that love God’s law, and for them there is no stumbling-block” (Ps 118:165).

Finally, allow both heart and voice to glory in the Lord. Be glad you have the love of His name within you, for He promises that He shall “bless the righteous” (Ps 5:12) and with His good pleasure shield and crown His people (vs. 13).

When applying these steps, we must always heed Abba Serapion’s advice to “learn that we shall be granted the gift of true discrimination when we trust, no longer in the judgments of our own mind, but in the teaching and rule of our fathers. The devil brings [the ascetic struggler] to the brink of destruction more effectively through persuading him to disregard the admonitions of the fathers and follow his own judgment and desire, than he does through any other fault” (*Philokalia* vol. 1, p. 104).

Here are five warning signs from Saint Paisius Velichkovsky that help us discern that we are under assault by the evil one and had best hasten to our spiritual father. Our thoughts are: 1) hindered from or turned away from the good; 2) no longer calm, with heart and mind disturbed; 3) causing heartache and pain within us; 4) blind to the promptings of fear of the Lord; 5) not operating freely, but troubled by darkness and confusion.

*Illumine our hearts, O Master with the pure light of Thy divine knowledge, and open our noetic eyes to the understanding of Thy gospel teachings. For Thou art our Illumination, O Christ our God, and unto Thee we ascribe glory with Thy Father and Thine All-holy Spirit.* – Priestly prayer before the Gospel reading

## July 7 – Thursday – Kellia Reading – Deuteronomy 17:14-20

**Under God, continued – Rulers: Deuteronomy 17:14-20, especially vss. 19, 20:** “He shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God and be careful to observe all these commandments and ordinances, that his heart may not be lifted above his brethren, that he may not turn aside from the commandment to the right hand or to the left and may prolong his rule, he and his sons among the sons of Israel.” In these verses, Moses reveals that every people, culture, society, and ruler that has a true will and intention to live under God possesses the genuine hope of enjoying a wholesome and enduring life on earth.

First of all, the ruler of a people must be from “among your brethren” (vs. 15), and should indulge neither in displays of power (vs. 16) nor in the pleasures of the flesh (vs. 17). He must fear the Lord (vs. 19) and form national policy based on God’s law, never lifting himself “above his brethren” (vs. 20). History provides many examples of rulers who followed God’s standards and of those who did not – a record that should encourage us to reflect upon this passage whenever we choose our leaders.

How people *set* rulers over themselves varies greatly in this world, but regardless of the process by which a people raises up its leader, the standard of God requires two forces working in coordination. First, according to Moses, the *people* must be able to say, “I will set a ruler over me” – in other words, they need to participate. Second, the process of accession must assure that the ruler is one chosen by the Lord Himself (vs. 15). The prophet shows us that God accepts neither foreign domination nor international manipulation (vs. 15). It does not matter whether these “outside” influences are direct, imposed by a foreign power, or adopted from a godless ideology.

The accession of Rehoboam son of Solomon to the throne of Israel exemplifies the interplay of these forces. Near the end of his reign, the aging Solomon introduced idolatry and forced labor into Israel’s national life. He built temples for the foreign gods Ashtoreth, Chemosh, and Milcom alongside the Temple of the Lord (3 Kgs 11:4-8). As a result God planted the seeds of civil revolt through His prophet Ahijah (vss. 11:23-37).

When Israel gathered to make Solomon’s son Rehoboam king (vs. 12:1), they called on the young prince to “lighten the harsh servitude” that Solomon had imposed (vs. 3). The people were prepared to set Rehoboam over them – until he failed to heed their appeal. “Thus Israel departed to their dwelling” (vs. 16) with the kingdom divided into the smaller nations of Israel and Judah. Only God’s intervention prevented civil war (vss. 21-24).

For a ruler to be “*under God*” in the manner that Moses describes, he must not be given to prideful display, self-indulgence, or the pleasures of the flesh (Dt 17:16-17). These are the very vices into which Solomon descended, and which aroused God’s anger (3 Kgs 10:26-11:2). Indeed, pride and self-indulgence led Herod Agrippa to participate in the murders of John the Forerunner and Christ (Mk 6:17-27; Lk 23:7-12).

A godly ruler steeps himself in God’s law, both privately and publicly. He ensures that “all these commandments” are obeyed (Dt 17:19). Woe to those who do not! During the reign of Emperor Aurelian (AD 270-275), the governor of Pamphylia tortured Bishop Alexander of Side with iron flails, tried to execute him by fire and wild beasts, and finally beheaded him. As soon as he sentenced Alexander, an evil spirit wrested his soul from the godless ruler.

*May the nations fear Thy Name, O Lord, and all the kings of earth Thy glory.* – Psalm 101:15

## July 8 – Friday – Kellia Reading – Deuteronomy 18:15-22

**Moses' Prophecy Concerning Christ: Deuteronomy 18:15-22, especially vs. 18:** *“I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brethren, and I will put My word in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all I command Him.”* In the passage we read today, Moses calls himself a prophet for the first and only time in his five books – and in this very same passage He proclaims the advent of Christ, “a Prophet like me” (vs. 15). In this passage we observe the standard that God sets for a true prophet (vs. 22), and the manner in which the Lord Jesus fulfills the criteria of this prophecy. Moses was a true prophet of God who perceived the coming Christ, the “Prophet who is to come into the world” (Jn 6:14).

Through Moses, God foretells the coming of Christ our God (Dt 18:18). We know that what Christ prophesied has either “come to pass” (vs. 22) or is yet to be fulfilled in the end-time. God raises up Christ for His people (Mt 15:24). The Lord Jesus is one of the people of Israel according to the flesh – that is, He is of “their brethren” (Dt 18:18; Jn 1:11). The words of God the Father are in His mouth, and *nothing* else (Dt 18:18; Jn 8:26). All that He speaks is not *of Himself* but “as My Father taught Me” (Jn 8:28).

Moses foretells that God will raise up “a Prophet like me” (Dt 18:15). Our Savior, despite being the pre-existent Word of God, who was with God and was God in the beginning (Jn 1:1-2), “made Himself of no reputation” and comes in the likeness of men (Phil 2:7). Like Moses, the Lord Jesus is among His brethren, the people of Israel, as fully man and as a Jew of the house of David. Christ serves as Moses did, mediating between God and all men, for in the Incarnation God does not speak in an overwhelming voice from “this great fire” (Dt 18:16; Heb 12:18-20). Instead He comes in *tolerable* form as a man, like Moses, humbling Himself and being “obedient to the point of death” (Phil 2:8).

As God also declares through Moses, the Lord Jesus is a great Prophet, for all His words “come to pass” – they are proven true (Dt 18:22). When the Lord Jesus meets Nathanael, He says, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit” (Jn 1:47). These words amaze Nathanael, prompting him to ask, “How do You know me?” (vs. 48). The Lord replies that He had seen him “under the fig tree” – an example of prophetic clairvoyance. Furthermore, He predicts that Nathanael “will see greater things than these” (Jn 1:50), a prophecy fulfilled in the many miracles that Nathanael subsequently witnessed, culminating with the Lord’s Resurrection.

The encounter with Nathanael is only the beginning, for the Lord continues to prophesy. He predicts that some of His disciples will not believe in Him, and “from that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more” (Jn 6:64, 66). He knows Judas will betray Him (Jn 6:64; Lk 22:21); indeed, Judas is the one who leads “officers from the chief priest and Pharisees” to the garden (Jn. 18:3). Before the night on which He “gave Himself up for the life of the world,” He predicts that the Son of Man will “suffer many things, and be rejected . . . and be killed, and after three days rise again” (Mk 8:31). All of these things came to pass.

Christ is like Moses in another significant way: the words of God alone are in His mouth. As He says to His fellow Jews, “My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me. If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority” (Jn 7:16-17). Although He is God, the Lord Jesus speaks in parables since many are not prepared “to know the mystery of the Kingdom of God” (Mk 4:11).

*O Thou Who didst raise Moses as a witness of Thy divinity, making him a precursor of the gospel of emancipation through the Cross and the Resurrection: O Lord, Glory to Thee.* – Aposticha of the Transfiguration

## July 9 – Saturday – Kellia Reading – Deuteronomy 19:11-21

**But I Say Unto You: Deuteronomy 19:11-21, especially vs. 13:** *“You shall cleanse the guilt of innocent blood from Israel, that it may be well with you.”* Attending to the law of the Lord as presented in this passage reminds us of a twofold blessing. First, God led our forebears to emphasize justice, law, and order and to insist on removing “evil from among you” (vs. 19). Second, we are blessed that we have God’s laws, together with the Holy Spirit, to guide our thinking and direct our actions from the heart. As we labor to walk in the way of our Lord, we find that the Old and the New Covenants work well together. We sinners receive clear direction for making life in this fallen world noble, honest, and fruitful.

We should be grateful that God has revealed the necessity of impartial justice and of civil and criminal codes that dispense reasoned correction and recompense for crimes and offenses. Living under such a legal system today, we gratefully remember our forebears who founded a judicial order that promotes a fair and decent social life, just laws, and godly behavior in society.

To understand how richly we are blessed, we need only read accounts of the corrupt and cruel justice system of the Nazis and the Soviets, or under Sharia law. We enjoy a heritage of wise law that traces back to Mosaic foundations. May we never slacken in our support of justice within our courts and legal system, maintaining the need for laws established on God’s foundation and striving for fairness and justice for all.

Even more, may we be ever grateful to our God and Savior Jesus Christ for showing us “a more excellent way” (1 Cor 12:31). He provides grace to us through our rebirth in the Spirit, that our “deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God” (Jn 3:21). The Lord Jesus leads those who are united to Him far beyond outward obedience to the law. He enables us to *fulfill* the law (Mt 5:17) with a righteousness that goes beyond exterior compliance, for He calls us to an inward change of heart, basing all our actions on God’s will as revealed in Christ.

For example, the Law rightly opposes ambush with intent to assault or murder (Dt 19:11). The Lord Jesus, however, reveals a more profound and saving solution to the uprising of hate within us: “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.” He adds, “Whoever [even] says ‘You fool!’ shall be in danger of hell fire” (Mt 5:21-22). Christ’s way of justice requires more of us than simply refraining from murder. He seeks to restore our humanity *within* us and cleanse our hearts and souls of hate – that inward sin that wells up, seethes, and destroys the heart.

The Law commands us not to covet (Dt 5:21), and thus expressly forbids turning our cravings for another’s property into an action such as removing a “neighbor’s boundaries your fathers established in . . . the land” (vs. 19:14). Again the Lord reveals a higher way, teaching us not to lay up “treasures on earth” for ourselves (Mt 6:19), but to “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness” so that “all these things shall be added to you” (vs. 33). May we always take Christ’s high road to justice.

Divine justice forbids false testimony (Dt 19:16-19). The Lord Jesus commands those who would enter His Kingdom not to consider the *speck* in our brother’s eye but rather the *plank* in our own (Mt 7:3). With Christ it is ever, deeply, a matter of the heart.

*Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation, and with Thy governing Spirit establish me.* – Psalm 50:10, 12

**July 10 – Sunday – Isaiah 43:9-14, Tone 3**  
**First Reading at Vespers for Great Martyr Euphemia**

**God-the-Witness: Isaiah 43:9-14, especially vs. 10:** “‘You are My witnesses, and I am a witness,’ says the Lord God. . . .” In these verses we hear a witness of far greater standing than the Prophet Isaiah, for the one who testifies is “the Lord God . . . the Holy One of Israel” (vs. 14). Isaiah’s hand remains present in the passage as evidenced by the two scribal notations: “says the Lord God” (vss. 10,13) and “thus says the Lord God” (vs. 14). Isaiah also provides the opening statement in verse 9. But the key testimony here, given the worldwide venue before which God-the-Witness submits His evidence, reveals a great deal concerning God and our relationship with Him, whether we are believers or not.

First, note that God gives testimony before “*all* the nations” gathered as one (vs. 9). The word *nations* (*ethne* in the original) describes the earth’s peoples as they are defined by their shared languages and cultures. However, God-the-Witness addresses mankind as a whole, including every language and culture and not merely a select tribunal of “rulers.” Isaiah registers the fact that these leaders also are “assembled from among [us]” (vs. 9).

Second, the standard for God’s testimony is stated openly. He challenges every person throughout all of time as He declares “these things” (vs. 9). Every man is included when He testifies. No one can dodge God’s testimony, for He invites all to come forward and witness under the same criteria He applies to Himself – to “tell us things from the beginning” (vs. 9). Let us admit that we are only temporary residents of earth! The credibility of God-the-Witness is humbling, for is there any knowledge to which He has not been privy?

Third, the Lord God demands a standard of truth of Himself and of any witness who would gainsay His testimony. Although He now speaks at an historical moment – the time when ancient Israel was exiled into slavery in Babylon – He is not shy to declare that He will *arouse* them, *redeem* them and *bind* “the Chaldeans” (vs. 14), their captors. And history bears Him out, for shortly after this testimony the Persians accomplished that liberation for Him.

Fourth, the Lord as witness clarifies what He means by “saves” – He gains the release of His people. “I am God, and besides Me there is no one who saves” (vs. 11). Such a claim puts other witnesses to the severest of tests, but actual events affirm God’s testimony. For instance, He “proclaimed, and . . . saved [and] . . . denounced foreign gods so there were none among you” (vs. 12).

Fifth, God’s testimony reveals His salvation to be irreversible. Thus, referring to the faithful, He says, “You are My witnesses, and I am a witness . . . and My Servant whom I chose, that you may know and believe, and understand that I am He” (vs. 10). Foremost among these fellow-witnesses is Christ our God, “My Servant” who “destroyed death by death” and “didst bestow resurrection upon those that are fallen” (paschal canon). God’s testimony is awesome and irrefutable!

Sixth, God-the-Witness testifies that Christ, His co-equal and the Servant of all men, has overcome the enslaving one that “no longer has dominion over Him” (Rom 6:9). In truth, the Holy One of Israel frees all who put their trust in God-the-Witness.

Seventh, the Lord God, that star witness before mankind, says, “Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy” (1 Tim 4:14). Worship and serve Him!

*Save us, O Son of God, who art risen from the dead, who sing to Thee: Alleluia!* – Second antiphon

**July 11 – Monday – Wisdom of Solomon 3:1-9**  
**Second Reading at Vespers for Great Martyr Euphemia**

**The Presence of the Saints: *Wisdom of Solomon 3:1-9, especially vss. 8-9:*** “They will judge nations and rule over peoples, and the Lord shall reign over them unto the ages. Those who trust in Him will understand truth, and the faithful shall continue with Him in love, because grace and mercy are upon His elect.” God actively bestows grace and mercy on His saints, daily extending virtues and blessings through these holy ones to those who know them by their acts and words. Great grace continues to be accomplished in this way, for as Saint John Chrysostom points out, “the grace of the Spirit has left written for us in the pages of the sacred writings the lives and conduct of all holy people so that we might learn all the deeds of virtue they performed, people of the same nature as ourselves, and that we might not be lazy in the practice of virtue” (*Homilies on Genesis 1-12*, p. 150).

There are many examples of a change of heart among men and women who, because of the actions of the saints, gave their lives to the Lord. Victor and Sosthenes, two Roman soldiers, were present at the torture of Great Martyr Euphemia in AD 303. They declared themselves for Christ after witnessing her perseverance in faith despite her torturers’ enticements, threats, and pain. By confessing Christ themselves, the two soldiers “were thrown to the wild beasts and thus finished their earthly course with glory.” Euphemia also “was finally thrown to the wild beasts and, with a prayer of thanksgiving, gave her soul into God’s hands” (*Prologue from Ochrid* vol. 3, p. 336).

The holy martyrs witnessed unto blood, while other saints testified to Christ by their actions and words, greatly affecting whole nations and populations. In July, for example, we celebrate Saint John of Shanghai and San Francisco, a clairvoyant teacher and wonderworker in France, China, and the United States. We also remember Saint Andrew of Crete, author of the Great Canon read every year during the first week of Lent; Saint Olga and her son, Prince Vladimir, equal-to-the Apostles, who established Christianity in Russia; Saint Seraphim of Sarov, who prepared Orthodox Russia for the atheistic onslaught of the twentieth century; and Saint Macrina, sister of Basil the Great and Gregory of Nyssa, who quietly guided those giants of Cappadocian theology.

Whether a saint is glorified in martyrdom or as a living witness before the world, he or she is ever with us, present and active. Father John Breck notes that when we make the effort to know them and unite our hearts to theirs, “we discover that they are not merely figures of the past. They are a living presence: persons whom we actually experience and with whom we enter into a shared fellowship in Christ. They acquire a ‘face,’ even a personality. [Then] our vision of reality expands [and] we become aware that they constantly accompany us and intercede for us.” This living presence of the saints is one of Christ’s enduring gifts to the Church.

Great Martyr Euphemia is an example of one who witnessed in death and continues to serve as a living participant in the life of the Church. When the Fathers of the Fourth Ecumenical Council were engaged in the monophysite controversy, they literally placed the matter into Saint Euphemia’s hands. Opening her reliquary, they laid two divergent confessions inside, sealed her coffin, and prayed for three days. “On the fourth day, when the tomb was opened, they saw the Orthodox confession of faith in the saint’s right hand and the heretical one beneath her feet. Thus was the conflict resolved by God’s power on the side of Orthodoxy” (*Prologue* vol. 3, p. 48).

*O Euphemia, all-glorious great martyr, by thine intercessions ever guard the Church, preserve us, shelter and deliver us from every harm, through the great mercy of Christ our God.* – Aposticha sticheron for Saint Euphemia

**July 12 – Tuesday – Wisdom of Solomon 5:15-6:3**  
**Third Reading at Vespers for Great Martyr Euphemia**

**The Wrath of God: *Wisdom of Solomon 5:15-6:3, especially vss. 19-20:*** “He will take holiness as an unconquerable shield, and sharpen His relentless wrath for a sword; and creation will fight with Him against the senseless.” Be attentive! In these words we meet a dire and solemn promise from a king on whom God bestowed “wisdom and understanding” (2 Chr 1:12). If we disdain or disregard Solomon’s caution we will regret it, for God knows our hearts. Listen to the poet Joseph Addison Alexander’s words: “There is a line, by us unseen, that crosses every path; the hidden boundary between God’s patience and His wrath” (“The Doomed Man”). E. J. Whately further illumines this mystery by explaining: “We cannot attribute to [God] passions like those of men: we can only describe the external effects which in men would be produced by these passions” (*Webster’s Dictionary of Synonyms*, 1942 ed., p. 52).

Solomon offers just such a description in verses 17-23, using violent, stormy imagery to convey the results of God’s corrective actions. If we accept that He is the Lord of all history – of each life and of our own destiny – then let us choose not to toy with Him, so as not to be numbered among “His enemies” (Wis 5:17)!

God’s wrath is *righteous* (vs. 18). We may not like His anger, we may complain about the Lord’s wrath, but invariably it comes as the consequence of violating His law. Divine wrath should discomfort those who oppose Him in any wrongful thought or action. If we chafe when someone says, “I told you so,” then we will know real heartache if we give the Lord reason “to tell us so.”

The wrath of God results in an *impartial* judgment (vs. 18). His fairness is expressed by the beautiful idiom “God does not admire a face” (or, as translated in Dt 10:17, “shows no partiality”). God, being passionless, cannot be aroused to prejudice.

In confronting God’s wrath, we meet *holiness* (Wis 5:19). In the year King Uzziah died, holiness “pierced” Isaiah while he was in the Temple (Is 6:5). Truly the holiness of God is *unconquerable* (Wis 5:19), for a warrior’s shield is not solely a defensive armor; often it is used offensively to batter foes, knocking them down and breaking their swords. God’s holiness batters every excuse that we invent to reveal our iniquity and sinfulness.

There is an overpowering, *relentless* quality to God’s wrath (vs. 20). The most conspicuous aspect of the inexorable wrath of God, the one holding every one of us in thrall, is death. God’s judgment against our sin is unavoidable (Gn 2:17), for in Adam all die (Gn 3:19; 1 Cor 15:22).

God’s wrath “will strike and leaps to [its] object as from a well-drawn bow” (Wis 5:21). When the unjust and cruel succeed and prosper, we cry out. Our limited perspective offers no explanation for such things, but God waits until the fullness of iniquity is complete (Gn 15:16). Saint Theognostos reminds us that “we will not be punished or condemned in the age to be because we have sinned, since we were given a mutable and unstable nature. But we will be punished if, after sinning, we did not repent and turn from our evil ways to the Lord; for we have been given the power to repent, as well as the time in which to do so” (*Philokalia* vol. 3, p. 369).

The wrath of God is powerful: “Hailstones full of anger will be hurled as from an engine of war” (Wis 5:22). Large hailstones damage those who find themselves in the open and unprotected from the hail’s force; hailstones can even prove deadly.

Wrath from God often comes as a result of *lawlessness* and *wrongdoing* (vs. 23) – our own as well as that of others. Yet God ever seeks to *winnnow* our hearts, souls, and bodies, that we may swiftly turn to Him and seek His mercy: “Remember me when You come into Your kingdom” (Lk 23:42). Let God’s wrath be a reminder to seek in earnest the healing of His grace.

*By Your mercy, O compassionate Christ, implant in me unshakable trust in You, that Your wrath may not abide upon me unto ages of ages.* – based on John 3:36

## July 13 – Wednesday – Kellia Reading – Deuteronomy 24:10-18

**Love, Equity, & Justice: Deuteronomy 24:10-18, especially vss. 14-15:** “*You shall not withhold wrongfully the wage of the poor and needy, whether one of your brethren or one of the resident aliens in your cities. Each day you shall pay him his wage and not let the sun go down on it, for he is poor and has set his hope on it; lest he cry out against you to the Lord, and it be sin to you.*” The Lord requires love, equity, and justice among all men, including creditors and debtors, employers and workers, wealthy and poor, judges and prisoners. And the Lord gives His reason for extending compassion and justice to us: He redeemed us from slavery, first by delivering our fathers in Egypt (vs. 18) and then through Christ’s Resurrection. God’s compassion is the context and foundation for relationships among His people and among all men.

The New Testament upholds this viewpoint. Saint Paul reminds masters that they should render unto their servants “what is just and fair, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven” (Col 4:1). The unity of the Body of Christ is organic. The Lord Jesus declares that “inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me” (M. 25:40). God cares for “the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph 4:3). “Freely you have received, freely give” (Mt. 10:8).

As we reflect on God’s concern for mutual love, equity, and justice, we are prompted by the Prophet Moses’ words to ask how we should act, as members of the Body of Christ, toward debtors, the disadvantaged, and those in prison, especially those under the penalty of death. God addresses each of these issues in turn: debtors (Dt 24:10-11), equity between creditors and debtors (vss. 12-13), prompt payment of fair wages (vss. 14-15), and restraint in applying the death penalty (vs. 16). None of these issues is merely historic. The poor we have with us always. Moses’ manner of speaking may not be framed in the contemporary idiom, but only outward appearances change, never God’s word or the requirements placed upon us!

In Moses’ time loans were neighborly exchanges (vs. 12) rather than the business of lending institutions. Today borrowing is more complicated, for our entire economy sadly relies on credit and interest. Still, God’s word abides: “When a creditor and a debtor meet with one another, the Lord watches both of them” (Prv 29:13). Note God’s preference that we *not* obligate ourselves to lenders. While loans for housing, transportation, and medical care may be necessary, credit card extravagance is surely not part of God’s approach to the *good life*. Capricious spending and mindless debt, like extortion and fraud, are unworthy of stewards of Christ.

The payment of wages in the present economy is partially controlled by law. Holding back a worker’s pay is a criminal act, much in the spirit of Moses’ teaching. Conversely, failure to return a fair effort for the wage that one is paid also is a sin before God. Let employers and wage-earners alike be accountable to God and one another in love, equity, and justice. Resolution of inequities between members of the Church should be handled as between brothers and sisters or, when necessary, with pastoral counsel and arbitration in the spirit of Christ.

The death penalty and the means of its administration remain lively issues today. The point of the Mosaic law, that “each shall be put to death for his own sin” (Dt 24:16) must be honored among us. Those found worthy of death ought to be proven perpetrators of the crimes they have committed – and may God have mercy upon us all!

All equity begins with our compassionate Lord, who redeemed all men from sin (vs. 18).

*O Lord our God, Who hast given us this good land for our heritage, may we always prove ourselves a people constant in doing Thy will and never failing in love, equity, and justice.* – adapted from the Lutheran Book of Worship

## July 14 – Thursday – Kellia Reading – Deuteronomy 25:1-3, 13-16

**Law and Prayer: Deuteronomy 25:1-3, 13-16, especially vs. 3, 13:** “Forty blows he may give him and no more, lest . . . your brother be disgraced before you. . . . You shall not have in your bag differing weights, a heavy and a light.” These two verses address diverse subjects within the Mosaic Law. They establish a clear division in the present passage, for one sets boundaries on the punishment of a wrongdoer while the other forbids the possession of deceptive measures. However, the unity of these sections also is noteworthy. Both draw upon previously stated divine law: “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor” (Dt 5:20) and “you shall not steal” (vs. 19). Both rulings derive in turn from the Ten Commandments. Furthermore, each commandment addresses a petition in the Lord’s Prayer: “Forgive us our debt as we forgive our debtors” (Mt 6:12) and “do not lead us into temptation but deliver us from the evil one” (vs. 13).

Holy Scripture discloses that God condones the use of corporal punishment for certain offenses under the law. However, in many countries today the beating of offenders is no longer practiced, having been removed by statute and the findings of higher courts. Hence it is no longer among the penalties imposed by judges.

In family life, tempered spanking by the parents is still available as a means of correcting children. However, if parents choose to use this means of discipline, let them note that the Lord’s will is to moderate corporal punishment so that the offender not “be disgraced before you” (Dt 25:3). The application of specified limits is set forth in order to guard against dehumanization. To exceed humane limits in the severity of the *stripes* or in their number surely is an offense against God.

The use of corporal punishment of children traditionally has been exercised within the context of prayer to God, who forgives our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Physical punishment ought never be an outlet for the passions of anger and revenge. If physical blows are used for correction, not only should they not degrade the offender, but they must bring an end to any rupture in relationship caused by sin or misdeed. Forgiveness and restoration must immediately follow corporal punishment of children!

In the second portion of our reading the Lord our God does not merely forbid the use of false weights and measures. He speaks against even possessing such things, for He opposes having any device at hand that might pose a temptation to sin against a brother or sister. Deception and dishonesty “are an abomination to the Lord your God” (vs. 16), while holding the very means of misleading another is contrary to our profession in Christ.

This reading teaches us to live as we pray, leading neither ourselves nor others into temptation but delivering us all from the evil one. As our Lord teaches: “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).

Maximos the Confessor says: “If we wish to be rescued from evil and not enter into temptation, we should have faith in God and forgive. . . . In this way . . . we shall be victors over the law of sin. . . . We shall trample underfoot the evil serpent” (*Maximos the Confessor: Selected Writings*, p. 117-18.) Saint Hesychios adds: “If you do not want to suffer evil, do not inflict it, since the suffering of it inevitably follows its infliction” (*Philokalia* vol. 1, p. 172).

*O Christ our God, set in motion within us an insatiable desire for Thyself, that we may fulfill the Father’s will, reflecting always heavenly blessedness in the conduct of our lives.* – adapted from *Maximos the Confessor: Selected Writings*

## July 15 – Friday – Kellia Reading – Deuteronomy 26:1-11

**Worship: Deuteronomy 26:1-11, especially vs. 11:** “So you shall rejoice in every good thing the Lord your God gave you and your house, you and the Levite and the resident alien among you.” The Prophet Moses’ commandments to the ancient people of God concerning worship can enrich our own appreciation of the Divine Liturgy. As Saint Athanasios the Great urges: “Israel of old, having first as a figure striven for the victory, came to the feast. . . . But we, my beloved, the shadow having received its fulfillment, and the types being accomplished, should no longer consider the feast typical. . . . but in accordance with the injunction of the Apostles . . . go beyond the types, and sing the new song of praise” (“Fourth Festal Letter,” *NPNF* Second Series, vol. 4, p. 516).

When we come to the Divine Liturgy to celebrate Christ our God, we follow Moses’ guidelines in a sense, for we “take some of the first of all the produce . . . which the Lord your God” has given (vs. 2). The priests “set it down before the altar of the Lord your God” (vs. 4) and *call* on the Lord (vs. 2), *declaring* all He has done (vs. 3). We “rejoice in every good thing the Lord your God gave” to us and to our households (vs. 11).

We rejoice to be part of “the Church of the living God” (1 Tim 3:15) that offers, sings hymns, blesses, and praises God, who is “ineffable, inconceivable, invisible, incomprehensible, ever existing and eternally the same.” We give thanks for “the dispensation for us” that Christ fulfilled and rejoice in the true light, the heavenly Spirit, the true faith that we have found by “worshiping the undivided Trinity: for He hath saved us” (Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom).

Moses gave instructions to take “the first of all the produce” of our labor and “put it in a basket,” then “go the place” blessed by God for worship (Dt 26:2). “Go to one who is priest” who shall “take the basket out of your hands and set it down before the altar of the Lord your God” (vss. 3-4). These acts clearly foreshadow the offertory of the Divine Liturgy. We bring loaves of bread that represent ourselves and our labor. From one of the loaves the priest takes a portion called the Lamb, placing it on the diskos “in remembrance of our Lord and God and Savior, Jesus Christ.” At the Great Entrance, this oblation is borne to the altar and offered to God.

The liturgy serves as the principal means by which the Church on earth joins with the hosts of heaven to call upon the name of the Lord (vs. 2). Yes, the Lord has extended filial privilege even to us, so that we may dare to call upon Him, “the heavenly God,” in words that exceed Moses’ prayer: “Our Father, Who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name. . . .”

The prayers and hymns of the liturgy speak of that which “the Lord swore to our fathers to give us” (vs. 3). His promises include salvation and a kingdom that exceeds any expanse of land on earth. God the Father gives His Only-begotten Son to all nations, “that whoever believe in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (Jn 3:16). Through the Cross, the Resurrection, the ascension into heaven, and second and glorious advent of Christ, the Life-giving Trinity raises us up again, brings us back to heaven, “endowed . . . with [His] Kingdom which is to come.”

In our worship we are blessed with numerous occasions to “rejoice in every good thing the Lord [our] God gave” us (Dt 26:11). Thus with good reason we chant in exaltation: “We praise Thee, we bless Thee, we worship Thee, we glorify Thee, we give thanks to Thee for Thy great glory. O Lord, heavenly King, God the Father Almighty; O Lord, the Only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ; and the Holy Spirit” (Doxology).

*O Son of God, accept me today as a communicant; for I will not speak of Thy mystery to Thine enemies; but like the thief, will I confess Thee. Remember me, O Lord, in Thy Kingdom.* – Precommunion Prayer

## July 16 – Saturday – Kellia Reading – Deuteronomy 28:1-14

**Blessings: Deuteronomy 28:1-14, especially vss. 1-2:** “Now it shall come to pass, as you cross the Jordan to the land the Lord your God gives you, if you diligently obey the voice of the Lord your God to be careful and do all His commandments I command you today, then the Lord your God will set you high over all nations of the earth. Then all these blessings shall come upon you and find you, because you obey the voice of the Lord your God. . . .” It is very likely that you will recognize the blessings that Moses promises in this passage, for they are the very things for which we pray in the Divine Liturgy “this city . . . and land, healthful seasons, abundance of the fruits of the earth, peaceful times, for travelers, the sick, the suffering, captives, and deliverance from all tribulation, wrath, danger, and necessity” (Litany of Peace).

God graciously blesses His servants, but He gives good things contingent upon steadfast obedience. He is the sole source of all true blessings that can be known, received, and enjoyed in every aspect of this life. For this reason, as each year begins, the Church entreats our all-bountiful Lord and God to “bless the crown of the new year by Thy goodness. Bestow Thy good things from above upon all Thy people, as also health, salvation, and good furtherance in all things. Deliver Thy holy Church, this city and every city and countryside from every evil assault, and vouchsafe unto them peace and tranquility” (prayer for the New Year).

Carefully observe the words of the Prophet Moses in light of these prayers, and notice how he states his message repetitively. It is a common theme in all of Holy Scripture and brings us back to the beginning: God’s blessings are contingent upon our obedience. Moses includes this very phrase in both of the first two verses of this chapter: “Obey the voice of the Lord your God.”

In the closing verses of the passage he ends with the same refrain: “So the Lord your God will make you the head and not the tail . . . if you heed the commandments of the Lord your God I command you today to keep and do them. You shall not transgress any of the words I command you this day” (vss. 13-14). To make sure our minds do not wander, Moses reiterates the same warning: We shall be established only “if you obey the voice of the Lord your God, and walk in His ways” (vs. 9).

In colorful language, the great prophet speaks of the ways in which we discern God as the true and only source of all blessings. First, He sets His Church “high over all nations” (vs. 1). His blessings *come upon* us and *find* us (vs. 2). Christ our God is the victor who defeats our enemies (vs. 7). He “commands the blessing on” us (vs. 8) and provides all that we receive. When we are established as His “holy people,” the Lord keeps the promise He swore to us (vs. 9). Who makes us “increase in good things” (vs. 11)? The Lord does. Who opens His heaven “to give the rain to your land in its season and to bless all the works of your hands” (vs. 12)? The Lord does.

Yes, the Lord blesses the good and also the evil, the just and the unjust (Mt 5:45). However, He particularly showers blessings on those who obey His commandments. He blesses the Church to lead nations and peoples (Dt 28:1,13). He blesses both urban and rural life (vs. 3). He gives fertility to our bodies, the soil, the livestock, and the natural world upon which we depend (vss. 3,11), as well as our economy (vs. 12). When enemies assault us He rescues us (vs. 7), for the Church remains His *holy people* (vs. 9) who are called by His name (vs. 10).

*Thou art a merciful God and lovest mankind, and unto Thee we ascribe glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.* – Third Antiphon prayer

## July 17 – Sunday – Kellia Reading – Deuteronomy 29:1, 9-21, Tone 4

**Serve, or Turn Away: Deuteronomy 29:1, 9-21, especially vs. 17:** “Surely there is not among you man, woman, family, or tribe whose mind turns away today from the Lord our God, to go and serve the gods of these nations?” Nearing the end of life, the Prophet Moses assembles the people of Israel, reviews their national experience with them, and solemnly reminds them that they are standing, as always, in the presence of God (vs. 11). The great prophet warns that each and every person, whether man or woman, young or old, esteemed leader or lowly worker, faces a momentous decision. Either they will enter into “this covenant and this oath” (vs. 13) under which God has sustained them from the time of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, or they will “go and serve the gods of [other] nations” (vs. 17).

We Christians, like Israel of old, are the people of God. We too need to embrace Moses’ warning and decide that we shall never stand apart from God in any manner. Each day through countless choices – from the grandest options to the seemingly small, insignificant decisions of life – we face that same eternal, precipitous watershed. We either “enter into the covenant of the Lord” (vs. 11) that we pledged in Christ or “go in the wanderings” of our hearts (vs. 18). These alternatives are constantly before us. We commit to God or else we “hear the words of this curse and flatter” ourselves into perdition (vs. 18).

Indeed, we must strive to receive and embrace the Lord Jesus Christ, our King and God. Labor to make your heart a pure and worthy place for Him, “that He may establish you today as a people for Himself” (vs. 12). Archimandrite Sophrony invites us to discover the riches that come to us in Christ. He writes, “The heart and mind are both completely occupied by Him only. This visible world gives place to a reality of another, higher order . . . a state difficult to describe” (*On Prayer*, p. 154). Why would we turn away from the Lord to become “a root bearing gall and bitterness” (vs. 18)?

Each of us has the God-given freedom to enter “into the covenant of the Lord” (vs. 11) or to “flatter himself in his heart” and go wandering (vs. 18). Stand united with God’s people and say, “The Lord is the defender of my life; of whom then shall I be afraid” (Ps 26:1)? To explicitly reject God, disdaining life and refusing the light of Christ, is foolhardy. “God will not be merciful” (Dt 29:20) in such cases.

Every choice we make impacts our own existence. As members of Christ’s holy Church, our decisions also affect the other members of Christ’s Body, past, present, and future – “those with us here today before the Lord your God, as well as with those not with us here today” (vs. 14). Our brothers and sisters grow as we submit to God’s will and “enter into the covenant of the Lord” (vs. 12). We need to take care “lest the sinner destroy the sinless along with him” (vs. 18). “God will not be merciful to him” or to any who follow him (vs. 19). Rather, “the anger of the Lord and His jealousy will burn against that man, and every curse written in this book will cling to him” (vs. 20).

May God save us from the consequences of turning away from God, who does not guide the self-confident person in his wanderings. Indeed, God promises to “blot out his name from under heaven” (vs. 19). How terrible to be *separated* from the Life-giver (vs. 20)! And yet we rejoice, for Christ our God has come that we “may have life, and . . . may have it more abundantly” (Jn 10:10).

*Open to me the doors of repentance, O Life-giver; for my soul goeth early to the temple of Thy holiness. Because Thou art compassionate, purify me by the compassion of Thy mercies.* – Lenten troparion

## July 18 – Monday – Kellia Reading – Deuteronomy 30:11-20

**Elements of Faith: Deuteronomy 30:11-20, especially vs. 14:** “*But the word is very near you, in your mouth, in your heart, and in your hands, that you may do it.*” Saint Paul understands that Moses’ concern in this passage is with faith. Quoting from these verses, the apostle writes: “‘The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart’ (that is, the word of faith which we preach)” (Rom 10:8). Truly, Moses grasped the elements necessary for true faith, for he urges: “If you hear the commandments of the Lord . . . keep his ordinances and judgments” (Dt 30:16). Here he demonstrates that faith has two elements involving the whole person: an inner choice to obey and a tangible follow-through.

Verse 14, quoted above, intimately addresses the full range of our being: “in your mouth” (evinced by speech), “in your heart” (settled within the center of our being), and “in your hands” (that is, manifested in words and acts). Most texts omit the final three words “in your hands,” which are unique to the Septuagint. They make very clear that the whole person is involved, encompassing all that we are.

We sometimes comply with demands made upon us under duress – “just going along,” as we say. We can act, knowing all the while “in our hearts” that we are not embracing what is required but merely *going through the motions*. This is acquiescence, not faith. We would not choose submission were we free of constraint, from within and/or without.

Outside pressures often push us to do the bidding of others. In this vein, notice that compliance often results from habit or unconscious conformity. Because the whole person is not engaged, this is not faith - a truth that the Lord spells out in the gospel when He gives flesh to the phrase “in your hands” in the parable of the two sons (Mt 21:28-31).

To grasp the essence of faith, it is necessary to look within and realize that choice comes before we put our hands to action. An action is *of faith* when it arises freely from what we will – when it is done *by choice*. In faith, the will is preface to action. The Prophet Moses reveals that in order to walk in God’s ways and keep “His ordinances and judgments” (Dt 30:16), we must first turn away from all other demands. Only then are we free to obey the Lord and manifest the presence of godly faith. We act in faith when we determine to act. Eternal danger comes when we turn “away and . . . do not hear, but go astray and worship different gods and serve them” (vs. 17), thus allowing commands from created beings to direct our heart and will.

Moses reveals that we must be ever alert to what is taking place *within* ourselves, to every transaction of the heart and the will. The apostle admonishes us: “Awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light” (Eph 5:14). Faith, ultimately, is a response evoked by another to which we accede freely. A call from God, or any lesser being, always presents faith as a possibility.

The Lord Jesus, the apostles, and the prophets “set before” us the choices of “life and death” (Dt 30:19). It is the mark of *their* glory – of Christ’s glory in them. They do not coerce, but earnestly request that we “choose life” so that we and our descendants may live (vs. 19). Faith never occurs unless we consider, choose, and act. Thus, when we are asked to love and embrace with the heart, as when God appeals to us, true faith does “cling to Him” (vs. 20). Why? Because He extends life with *love* (freely offered) and never *death* (marked by coercion).

*O Master, Lord our God, put off from us the old man and fill us with the power of Thy Holy Spirit that we may be no more children of the body, but children of Thy Kingdom.* – Baptismal Prayer

**July 19 – Tuesday – Third Kingdoms 17:1-24**  
**First Reading at Vespers for the Prophet Elijah**

**The True God: 3 Kingdoms 17:1-24 (1 Kings 17:1-24), especially vs. 14:** “For thus says the Lord, ‘The bin of flour shall not be used up, and the jar of oil shall not run dry. . . .’” Elijah, along with Moses, prepares our hearts and minds for the coming of God the Son in the flesh. Just as the Lord Jesus exposes the withering of ancient Israel when He rebukes the fig tree and then chastises the nation’s priestly leadership (Mt 21:18-45), so Elijah rebukes King Ahab and the priests of Baal for Israel’s spiritual drought (3 Kgs 17:1). As angels care for the Lord in the desert after His fast (Mt 4:11), so God provides for Elijah in the wilderness (3 Kgs 17:6). Christ feeds the multitudes when they are famished (Mt 14:15-21), and Elijah provides for a widow and her son (3 Kgs 17:8-16). The Lord Jesus raises a dead son and gives him to his widowed mother (Lk 7:11-15), even as God enables Elijah to restore life to the son of a widowed mother (3 Kgs 17:21-23).

Elijah thus foreshadows the great mystery we know in Christ: “God is the Lord, and hath appeared unto us” (Ps 117:26). As a type of God the Word, Elijah prophetically forecasts how Christ will become incarnate and live among us. Christ judges every evil that separates men from God, quenches our thirst (Jn 4:14), feeds us in our poverty, and bestows eternal life as a gift. Thus we find Him everywhere in Elijah’s life and teaching.

In the age of Elijah, the Spirit of God revealed that King Ahab “did evil before the Lord, more than all who were before him” (3 Kgs 16:38). The foolish king took the pagan princess Jezebel as his wife, and that wicked queen led Ahab far astray from God, so that he “went and served Baal and worshiped him” (vs. 39).

The drought that Elijah prophesies (vs. 17:1) is actually a merciful warning to the royal apostate and his erring people, whom God loved greatly. However, the Lord of hosts does not abide infidelity in those who covenant with Him, nor does He abide idolatrous worship. How often our Lord Jesus warned the people of God, as He walked among them, that they risked losing their birthright to the Gentiles (Mt 12:18-21).

Just as God leads Elijah to the Brook Cherith (3 Kgs 17:3), so the Lord Jesus promises that “whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst” (Jn 4:14). How manifold are the ways of the Lord Jesus who nurtures us “beside the water of rest” (Ps 22:1)!

In the gift of this world, God provides all that men need. Most especially, He cares for His own who fall into extremities of want: “The bin of flour was not used up, and the jar of oil did not run dry, according to the word the Lord spoke by Elijah” (3 Kg. 17:16). Let us be encouraged, for this is the way Jesus our Lord fed the multitudes in the wilderness; He gives us both earthly bread and the “true bread from heaven . . . who comes down . . . and gives life to the world” (Jn 6:32-33). “O taste and see that the Lord is good. . . . for there is no want to them that fear Him” (Ps 33:8-9)!

Elijah also reveals that God manifests Himself to the faithful in prayer. “O Lord my God, let the soul of this child come back to him” (3 Kgs 17:21). Through Elijah, God prepares us, His stricken people, to know Him as victor over death by His crucifixion and Resurrection. The Lord Jesus tells the doubting Sadducees before His trial and death, “You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God” (Mt 22:29).

The Prophet Elijah witnesses alongside the Apostle Paul that “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Heb 13:8). Thus we should “not be carried about with various and strange doctrines. For it is good that the heart be established by grace” (vs. 9).

*O Word, Thou true Image of the Being on high, and His unshaken Seal, His Wisdom, Arm, right Hand, and Power, Thee do we praise with the Father and the Holy Spirit.* – Sticheron of the Ninth Ode of Orthros

**July 20 – Wednesday – Third Kingdoms 18:1, 17-42**  
**Second Reading at Vespers for Prophet Elijah**

**Contrition: 3 Kingdoms 18:1, 17-42 (1 Kings 18: 1, 17-42), especially vs. 37:** “Hear me, O Lord, hear me with fire, and let these people know You are the Lord God, so as to turn the heart of this people back.” According to Saint John of the Ladder, “However great the life we lead may be, we may count it stale and spurious, if we have not acquired a contrite heart. For this is essential, truly essential if I may say so, that those who have again been defiled after baptism should cleanse the pitch from their hands with unceasing fire of the heart and with the oil of God” (*Ladder of Divine Ascent* 7.66, p. 79).

Saint John asserts the same truth that Elijah sets before God’s ancient people on Mount Carmel. The prophet calls for contrition of heart from Israel in a four-step process. And as he did for ancient Israel, so he now reveals to us how we may acquire the contrite heart essential for a relationship with the living God. We must first name our sin; cease compromising; embrace our dependency on God; and finally demonstrate true contrition in word and deed. These four steps are necessary regardless of whether we are chided by God, as the people were on Mount Carmel, or taught in the Church by the Holy Spirit (Jn 14:26).

Observe how Elijah conducts himself in this encounter. Directed by God, he goes to the apostate King Ahab. He censures the ruler to his face, explicitly naming the king’s sin and showing Ahab’s wrongdoing to be the cause of the drought (3 Kgs 18:17-18). The prophet is frank about the idolatry of the royal house. Elijah thus closes the door on any attempt by Ahab to assign blame to Jezebel. The king adopted her false religion and “forsook the Lord your God and followed after the Baals” (vs. 18). He knows he has apostatized.

Likewise, we must address our own sins by name and refuse to resort to generalities. Each of us must confess his guilt. One might question whether Ahab truly acknowledges his sin, but the people know theirs (vs. 39), for Elijah challenges the entire nation and not just Ahab.

In one of the most beautiful statements in all of Scripture, he calls upon them to stop compromising. “How long will you be undecided between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him, but if Baal, follow him” (vs. 21). Although the people do not answer the prophet (perhaps out of shame and fear, or even defiance), the challenge is laid down and the controversy addressed by Elijah’s proposed *contest* (vss. 23-24). Elijah offers a way to respond to God that will end all compromise. Equivocating with God cannot continue if we would call Him “Lord.”

Take careful note, however, that the prophet does not depend on himself but on God alone. Look at his prayer: “O Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, answer me, O Lord, answer me this day with fire, and let this people know You are the God of Israel, and I am Your servant; and for Your sake I do all these works. Hear me, O Lord, hear me with fire, and let these people know You are the Lord God, so as to turn the heart of this people back” (vss. 36-37).

When we feel contrition in our hearts, who gives us penitential awakening and cleansing grief? These reactions are not our works; it is the Lord who *turns the heart back* to Himself.

At last there comes God’s stunning miracle, the dramatic intervention by which He touches the people’s hearts. They prostrate themselves and cry out in contrition: “Truly, the Lord is God; He is God” (vs. 39). But Elijah does not accept mere words; Israel’s national life must be purged of Baal worship, and so he executes the pagan priests. True contrition begins in confession, but then steps to purge every inclination to sin must follow. We seek God’s help to end any persistent sin that clings to us, and to defeat every temptation to repeat past offenses.

*O Physician and Healer of my soul, blot out all my transgressions, grant me complete contrition of heart and grace to avoid my previous evil ways and strength to resist further sin.* – Prayer after Confession

**July 21 – Thursday – Third Kingdoms 19:1-16**  
**Second Reading at Vespers for Prophet Elijah, continued**

**Knowledge of God: 3 Kingdoms 19:1-16 (1 Kings 19:1-16), especially vs. 9:** “There he went into a cave and rested. Behold the word of the Lord came to him and said to him, ‘Elijah, what are you doing here?’” Elijah’s custom was to stand in prayer before God’s presence. Whenever God spoke to him, he heard Him clearly (vss. 9, 13). How did the prophet know it was God speaking? How is it that God discloses Himself so that we may know with certainty that the word we hear within us is from the Lord? There are so many other voices we hear!

In the present account, God reveals in part how He makes Himself known to His beloved. Elijah is a key figure in a raging culture war in the kingdom of Israel. Queen Jezebel, with the full power of the throne, blatantly seeks to kill him (vs. 2). So he “he arose and ran for his life” (vs. 3), moving far away from Israel and her control. He passes through the adjoining kingdom of Judah and reaches the southernmost limits of settlement, near Beersheba. From there he presses on. Exhausted by a day’s journey into the desert, he prays for death, lies down, and sleeps (vss. 4-5).

When Elijah is ready to listen, God makes Himself clearly known to him. First God provides for the prophet by means of an angel who sustains him during his time in the wilderness (vss. 4-8). Throughout his life, Elijah has known God as Provider. Ravens fed him when God hid him at the Brook Cherith in the Transjordan wilderness (vs. 17:4-6). In the confrontation with the priests of Baal, God provided the fire that consumed Elijah’s offering (vs. 18:38).

Take note: God is ever-present and provides for us, as King David says: “Thou hast visited the earth and abundantly watered her; Thou hast multiplied the means of enriching her . . . Thou hast prepared their food” (Ps 64:9-10). God supplies our every need, even delivering us from the deprivation that our sin creates.

Notice, also, how God probes and manifests Himself within Elijah’s mind and heart. Twice the Lord asks, “Elijah, what are you doing here?” (3 Kgs 19:9,13). The Lord Jesus likewise questions His followers. He asks the disciples, “Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?” (Mt 16:13). Then Jesus presses them again, “But who do you say that I am?” (Mt 16:15).

The Lord is ever disclosing Himself to our hearts and minds: “I stand at the door and knock” (Rv 3:20). In each of our daily decisions, Christ asks, “What are you doing here?” always providing saving truth and commandments.

God’s probing of our innermost being alerts us to His presence and enlightens our minds and hearts. If we are watchful, we will hear Him speaking – and when He has our attention, He will command. He emboldens Elijah to declare to Ahab, “There shall not be any dew nor rain during these years except at my word” (3 Kgs 17:1). Then God commands Elijah to go to the Brook Cherith (vs. 17:3). When the water dries up there, God commands Elijah, “Arise, go to Zarephath” (vs. 17:9). After three years of drought, the Lord finally directs His prophet to “go and appear to Ahab” (vs. 18:1).

The Lord regularly makes Himself known. “Go and return on your way to the desert of Damascus,” He says, and “anoint Hazael as king over Syria. You shall also anoint Jehu the son of Nimshi as king over Israel; and shall anoint Elisha the son of Shaphat . . . as prophet in your place” (vss. 19:15-16). Thus God determines the end of the spiritual “culture war” in Israel, and prepares to rid the kingdom of idolatry and the attendant evils promoted by Ahab and Jezebel.

*O Lord, Thou hast provided us with Thy life-giving Mysteries for our souls and bodies, and enlightened the eyes of our hearts: by Thy grace may we ever fulfill Thy commandments.* – Post-communion prayer

**July 22 – Friday – Third Kingdoms 19:19-21, Fourth Kingdoms 2:1-15**  
**Third Reading at Vespers for Prophet Elijah**

**Succession in Ministry: 3 Kingdoms (1 Kings) 19:19-21; 4 Kingdoms (2 Kings) 2:1-15, especially vs. 14:** “He took Elijah’s mantle which had fallen upon him and struck the water. . . . Then he said, ‘Where is the Lord God of Elijah himself?’ And he struck the water again, and it divided this way and that. So Elisha crossed over.” The dramatic account of the translation of the Prophet Elijah into God’s “brilliant city” in the heavens confirms his divine glorification as well as his eternal place as chief among the God-inspired prophets. It indicates the reason why the Church calls upon the faithful to “raise our voices in rejoicing and joy, saying, rejoice, O earthly angel and heavenly man, Elijah of great name!” (Vespers for the Prophet Elijah).

Furthermore, the account of Elijah’s ascension serves as a type of the ministerial succession that continues among God’s people up to the present day. Continuity in ministry is embodied in the doctrine of apostolic succession, which assures that “the genuine faith and life of Christianity is passed on from church to church, from generation to generation and from place to place, through the succession of the Holy Tradition of the Church in the consecration of bishops, whose teachings and practice is identical to each other and to that of the apostles of Jesus” (Fr. Thomas Hopko, *The Bible and Church History*, p. 122). In the exaltation of Elijah, we witness the passing on of genuine faith and life to the godly Elisha – and to many generations afterwards.

The present reading shows that succession in God’s ministry is anchored in the observable, heartfelt unity among those who serve His people. In the case of Elijah and Elisha, we see that Elijah gives Elisha, his disciple, every opportunity to find his own way once the Lord revealed that it was “time . . . to take up Elijah into heaven” (vs. 1). Nevertheless, Elisha three times demurs: “As the Lord lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you!” (vss. 2,4,6).

The unity between the two great prophets was shared widely with a group of men called the “sons of the prophets” (vss. 3, 5), who were members of a prophetic order. Note that the unity-in-ministry that underlies succession is for life and extends beyond this present existence. Elisha goes across the Jordan with Elijah, knowing that the Lord is about to take his master, but he maintains their unity in the face of death.

After Elijah’s translation to heaven, Elisha calls to “the Lord God of Elijah” (vs. 14), revealing that he considers their unity binding despite Elijah’s entrance into eternity. This same pastoral unity underlies the apostolic succession that has continued from the apostles to our present-day bishops. As Bishop Kallistos Ware explains, “The Church is . . . formed by the communion of many hierarchs with one another, and of each hierarch with the members of his flock” (*The Orthodox Church*, p. 246).

The community of bishops reveals that the unity underlying succession in ministry is a gift from God. God Himself is the source of unity, assuring a continuous succession among those in His service. Succession does not derive from human agency, although it is expressed through human actions (vss. 8, 14); rather, it is mystical in nature, being God-given. The blessings extended to the people of God during Elijah’s lifetime are continued without interruption by Elisha (4 Kgs 2:4-9, 13). The “double share” of Elijah’s spirit (vs. 9) does not refer to quantity – it is a Hebrew idiom indicating succession of truth and action. Thus the charismata of the apostles are extended doubly through Christ’s apostolic bishops to this day.

*Be mindful, O Lord, of every bishop of the Orthodox, who rightly divideth the word of Thy truth and put not to confusion any in Thy ministry, but visit us all with Thy benevolence.* – Divine Liturgy of Saint Basil the Great

## July 23 – Saturday – Kellia Reading – Deuteronomy 32:1-43

**Fulfilling the Prophecy: Deuteronomy 32:1-43, especially vs. 2:** “Let my proverbial saying be awaited as the rain, and let my words come down as raindrops on the wild grass, and as snowfall on the sown grass.” Today’s reading is the second of the nine odes underlying many canons used in Orthodox worship. All the odes are derived from Old Testament sources except for the ninth, the Song of the Theotokos (Lk 1:46-55).

The Second Ode (Dt 32:1-49) is unique for it “is never chanted, save only in Great Lent during which, on Tuesday only, it is chanted to its end. And for each of the troparia of the Second Ode of the Canon, we say: Glory to Thee, our God, glory to Thee!” (*Psalter According to the Seventy*, p. 264). Both the First Ode (Ex 15:1-19) and Second Ode are from the books of Moses and frame his ministry. The first is a thanksgiving to God for deliverance at the Red Sea, and the second is a prophecy offered at the end of Moses’ life.

The primary theme of this prophecy is stated briefly in a troparion associated with the use of the ode during the Great Fast: “Who will not weep for thee? Who will not mourn for thee, O my soul? For thou yearnest for the evil things, and seekest not the good with eagerness. And thou always despisest the righteous Judge who is longsuffering for thy sake” (“The Compunctious Books of Lent,” in Manley, *Grace for Grace*, p. 640). Let us be stricken at heart that we may turn, repent, and heed the warning of this solemn hymn!

First, may we rouse ourselves and heed the Prophet Moses, who says, “Let the earth hear the words of my mouth” (vs. 1). Strive not merely to read the words of the ode but to take hold of them in your heart and soul, following the advice of Theoliptos of Philadelphia: “Do not allow any phrase to go uncomprehended. Should anything escape your understanding, begin the verse again, and repeat this as many times as necessary, until [your heart] grasps what is being said” (*Philokalia* vol. 4, p. 185).

Then let us “ascribe greatness to our God” (vs. 3). Notice how the ode teaches the uniqueness of the Lord, for He is faithful, righteous, holy (vs. 4), a Father (vs. 6), Savior (vs. 15), the only God (vs. 39) and Judge of all (vs. 43). How do we acknowledge all of these attributes? By worshiping Him who spreads out His “wings, taking [us] up, carrying [us] on” His back (vs. 11). There is no substitute for the worship of God, for we are “the apple of His eye” (vs. 10).

After the introductory verses, the first major section (vss. 4-14) details God’s love for His people, including both ancient Israel and the Church. Our Father created us and brought us into existence as His people (vs. 6). We are “the Lord’s portion . . . the people of Jacob” (vs. 9). “Let us worship and fall down before Him. . . For He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture” (Ps 94:6-7).

The next section recounts the ingratitude of God’s people (Dt 32:15-22). Ingratitude continues to mar the relationship between the Lord and His people, just as it did His relationship with ancient Israel. How else shall we understand the punishing arrows of God (vss. 23-24)? Let us heed another troparion of the ode: “By fervent repentance escape from the fire; through thy mourning, tear in pieces the mourning garment of the passions and put on the robe of God” (*Lenten Triodion*, p. 211).

Often the Lord works through pagans or secular foes to punish His people, to “make their memory cease from among men” (vs. 26). The final section (vss. 23-43) reveals that vengeance and recompense on His people – as well as on the enemies of the Church – belong to God, coming when “they were not wise to understand these things” (vs. 29). The prophet cries out: “Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people; and let all the angels of God be strong with Him; for He will avenge the blood of His sons” (vs. 43). O Merciful Lord, take pity on us and save us.

*O all ye angelic powers, Archangels, Cherubim and Seraphim, supplicate God, the Giver of all good, that He may grant us remission of our debts and release from passions.* – from “The Compunctious Book of Lent”

## July 24 – Sunday – Kellia Reading – Deuteronomy 33:1-29, Tone 5

**Blessings: Deuteronomy 33:1-29, especially vs. 29:** “Blessed are you, O Israel. Who is like you, a people saved by the Lord. Your Helper will defend you as with a shield; and the sword shall be your boast.” A pair of words – *barak* and *esher* – are used to express “blessing” in the Hebrew scriptures, corresponding to *evlogetos* and *makarios* in Greek Septuagint. These pairs appear in both the Hebrew and Greek versions of this passage, the first in verse 1 and the latter in verse 29. *Evlogetos* and *barak* are used to address God and to acclaim His initiative (see Lk 1:68). *Esher* and *makarios* describe those blessed by God. For example, *makarios* is used in the Beatitudes (Mt 5:3-11) in describing the felicity of the godly (Lk 1:48).

In the present passage, “Moses the man of God” (Dt 33:1) begins by blessing the Lord’s people – but of course God is the One who blesses through His prophet. The prophecies in verses 6-25 are set within the larger context of God’s unending blessing on His people (vss. 1-5, 26-29). For the faithful, Moses reveals here what the Apostle means when he declares that “God . . . has blessed us with every spiritual blessing . . . in Christ” (Eph 1:3). The prophet unveils the depth of Saint Paul’s words in ten phrases that capture the rich, vivid portrait of the felicitous blessings of God upon His people.

“The Lord came down from Sinai and appeared to us” (Dt 33:2). Here we recall the words that are sung at Orthros: “God is the Lord, and hath appeared unto us” (Ps 117:26). This is the very God who “has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself” (Heb 9:26).

When we read that the Lord “hastened from Mount Paran along with myriads at Kadesh, angels with Him” (Dt 33:2), it prefigures Saint Paul’s promise of the majestic return of Christ, when “the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels” (2 Thes 1:7).

“He spared His people” (Dt 33:3) as Christ saves us by grace through faith (Eph 2:8). In every generation God’s people are “under . . . the law from His words which Moses commanded us” (Dt. 33:3-4). Thus Christ teaches that He did not come “to destroy the Law. . . . but to fulfill” it (Mt 5:17). We are to *perfect* the intent of the Law, for our Father (Mt 5:48).

The Lord God was “Ruler among the beloved people” of Israel (Dt 33:5), but today the Lord Jesus is King over Israel and the Church. When Pilate asks, “Are You the King of the Jews?” Jesus replies, “It is as you say” (Mt 27:11). He is the King who says, “Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you” (Mt. 25:34)?

Just as there was “no one like the God of the Beloved” (Dt 33:26), who can be compared with Jesus, our King and our God? In former times God spoke through the prophets in diverse ways, according to Saint Paul, but “in these last days [He has] spoken to us by His Son” (Heb 1:2).

Ancient Israel was “under the strength of the everlasting arms” (Dt 33:27). Are we any less so, who have “the whole armor of God . . . to withstand in the evil day” (Eph. 6:13)?

The Lord “cast out the enemy” (Dt 33:27) of old, and continues to do so. We know that in the Church no power can separate us “from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:39).

When God promises that “Israel shall dwell in hope” (Dt 33:28), that promise includes ancient Israel and the Church. Yes, all who enter into Christ “will be saved” (Jn 10:9).

In every age Israel is “a people saved by the Lord” (Dt 33:29), for the Lord Jesus promises, “I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen” (Mt 28:20).

*We give thanks unto Thee, O King invisible, who by Thy boundless power hast blessed us with Thy grace and compassions and love toward Thy people, O good Master.* – Bowing Prayer, Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom

## July 25 – Monday – Kellia Reading – Deuteronomy 34:1-12

**The Prophet Moses: Deuteronomy 34:1-12, especially vs. 10:** *“Now there has not arisen in Israel a prophet like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face. . . .”* The great Prophet Moses enjoys a unique place among the people of God, both past and present. Of few mortal men can it be said that the Lord knew them *face to face*. Scripture says that “the Lord knew” Moses – and the Apostle Paul teaches that only those who love God are known by Him (1 Cor 8:3). Such “knowledge” does not refer to God’s ability to see a man’s heart. Rather, it describes God’s disclosure of Himself to a man, when He invests that person with divine energies. A man who is known by God face to face may be finite and fallible, yet he is caught up by what Saint Isaac the Syrian calls “diverse contemplations and divine revelations, by the lofty vision of spiritual things and by ineffable mysteries” (Vlachos, *Orthodox Psychotherapy*, p. 346).

From his initial meeting with God, when the Lord called to him from the burning bush, to his reception of the Law on Mount Sinai, this humble servant of God faces the fiery divine presence repeatedly. He speaks to the Lord, and God “answered him by voice” (Ex 19:19) that he should “report it to the children of Israel” (vs. 20:22).

The final verses of our present reading in Deuteronomy summarize what God achieves through Moses. The first time the Lord meets him he answers meekly, “Here I am” (Ex 3:4) and obeys the Lord. As a result, there are “signs and wonders the Lord sent him to do . . . and . . . all those great wonders and the mighty hand which Moses performed in the sight of all Israel” (Dt 34:11-12).

The hallmark of Moses’ ministry is God’s promise of the “good and large” land, a hope in which he trusts from the time God first reveals the vision (Ex 3:8). Before Moses’ death, the Lord kindly shows him “the land I swore to give Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, ‘I will give it to your seed’” (Dt 34:4). There is no place in the vicinity of Mount Nebo from which the naked eye can actually see “all the land” (vs. 1). Yet God shows the whole of it to Moses prior to his death. Because the prophet fulfilled the trust that the Lord laid on his heart, God reveals to Moses the entire inheritance of ancient Israel.

When Moses completed his life work, his labors were confirmed by a miracle: the land of promise became a vision fulfilled. The final verses of Deuteronomy recall the prodigious task that the prophet attained. Under God’s direction, he led the people of Israel out of Egypt, across the Red Sea to Mount Sinai, and then on a forty-year trek in the wilderness to the plains of Moab, across the Jordan River from Jericho. Further, he trained and ordained his successor, Joshua the son of Nun (vs. 9), who would lead Israel across the Jordan into the Promised Land. Israel wept at Moses’ death, yet the great Seer already had transferred authority to “the son of Nun [who] was full of the Spirit of understanding . . . so [that] the sons of Israel heeded him and did as the Lord commanded Moses” (vs. 9).

How are we to understand the assertion that God buried Moses (vs. 6)? We must certainly number him among those like Enoch (Gn 5:24) and Elijah (4 Kgs 2:11) whom God took to Himself. Moses’ burial befits one whom God “knew face to face” (Dt 32:10). In the words of Saint Isaac the Syrian, he was transformed by “the lofty vision of spiritual things and by ineffable mysteries.” His burial at God’s hand enables us to understand his appearance with Elijah at the Lord’s Transfiguration on Mount Tabor (Mt 17:3).

*O holy Prophet Moses, as thou didst converse with Christ our Lord revealing Him as the God of old who spoke in the Law, even now intercede with Him that He would save our souls.* – Sticheron of the Transfiguration

**July 26 – Tuesday – Isaiah 43:8-14**

**First Reading at Vespers for Great Martyr Panteleimon**

**God Is the Lord: Isaiah 43:8-14, especially vs. 10:** “‘You are My witnesses, and I am a witness,’ says the Lord God, ‘and My Servant whom I chose, that you may know and believe, and understand that I am He. Before Me there was no other God, nor shall there be after Me.’” In the first verse of this reading the Prophet Isaiah sketches the proceedings of a court in session, wherein “all the nations are gathered together” (vs. 9). Only one court in history has ever approached the status of a world judicial body for every nation and ruler: the International Court of Justice now operating in The Hague. Yet, in terms of the criteria outlined by Isaiah, even this legal body does not approach the powers of the ultimate tribunal to be convened by God at the end of time.

In the remainder of the passage God speaks for Himself, challenging us to inquire, “Who is the God for whom Isaiah serves as a court reporter? Who laid down these criteria for the last great tribunal?” Isaiah speaks of rulers “assembled from among them” (vs. 9), that is, rulers from all the nations. The peoples of the world have served a variety of religious and ideological “gods,” but now God the Ruler speaks to His people and calls them “My witnesses” (vss. 10, 12). He is the God of ancient Israel and the Church, the only God (vs. 10).

Surely the God we know chooses His own witnesses, for He is “the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus” (1 Pt 5:10). And He calls us “according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus” (2 Tm 1:9).

Additionally, our God clearly separates Himself from every ruler, norm, teaching, and ideology (all other “gods”) that has ever claimed supremacy over men’s hearts, minds, and wills. “Before Me there was no other God, nor shall there be after Me” (Is 43:10).

Our God names as His prime witness our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ: “My Servant whom I chose, that you may know and believe, and understand that I am He” (vs. 10). The Church teaches that Isaiah’s Suffering Servant is in fact this very Christ.

To underscore God’s point concerning Christ, He also declares, “I am God, and besides Me there is no one who saves” (vs. 11). The divinity of Christ Jesus, who is one, co-eternal, and consubstantial with the Father, places Him within the godhead of the One who saves, exactly as Saint John Chrysostom expresses it in the preface to his anaphora: “For Thou art God ineffable, inconceivable, invisible, incomprehensible, ever-existing and eternally the same, Thou and Thine only-begotten Son and Thy Holy Spirit.” Christ is God our Savior!

Before the last, eternal, and ultimate court, God reminds us of the record of history, substantiating His place as Savior and God: “‘I proclaimed, and I saved. I denounced foreign gods so there were none among you. You are My witnesses, and I am a witness,’ says the Lord God” (vs. 12). The entire scope of history is covered “even from the beginning” (vs. 13).

By using the word *redeems* (vs. 14), God identifies Himself as the Savior who obtains our release from the evil powers of sin and death. Hold Christ in mind, for He is the One who, “having forgiven you all trespasses, [and] having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us . . . has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross” (Col 2:13-14). Our God not only redeems us from slavery but also gives us complete redemption, providing us with a free opportunity to become His own sons and daughters.

*Shelter us, O God, in the shelter of Thy wings; drive away from us every enemy and foe; make our life peaceful; have mercy on us and save our souls, for Thou art a merciful God.* –Proskomedia prayer

**July 27 – Wednesday – Wisdom of Solomon 3:1-9**  
**Second Reading at Vespers for Great Martyr Panteleimon**

**The Saints' Contrasts: *Wisdom of Solomon 3:1-9, especially vs. 8:*** “They will judge nations and rule over peoples, and the Lord shall reign over them unto the ages.” Solomon reveals God’s view of the saints by using vivid contrasts to awaken our consciousness, move our hearts, and bring us to thanksgiving. The saints are God’s vessels, exposing the differences between that which appears true from what actually is true. They allow us to compare external goodness with what is hidden in men’s hearts. The saints teach us to live humbly under the reign of God. Come, let us examine the contrasts we find in the saints.

The word “torture” aptly describe the myriad of physical assaults, mental beatings, emotional attacks, and spiritual onslaughts that haunt our earthly life. Every one of the saints was touched by torture, in one form or another. Yet because they were in the hand of God, in the invincible place of endurance, they remained untouched (vs. 1). From an eternal perspective they were neither deformed, hurt, scathed, nor harmed in spirit. Torture did not touch them. Thanks to God they are present now, immutable, sound, staunch, and fit.

When we contrast the eyesight of men with God’s vision, we see that our perception is imperfect. Without His illumination, human vision remains undiscerning. From an earthly vantage point the saints may seem to have died (vs. 2), but they passed away in a hope filled with God’s immortality. There is no “misfortune” in that (vs. 2)! In God they are truly at peace and not destroyed (vs. 3). They embraced every punishment they received in life as from the hand of the Lord. And God shows them great kindness, having tested and “found them worthy of Himself” (vs. 5).

What does it mean to be worthy of God? The saints did not consider themselves righteous as they suffered and witnessed for God. They accepted chastening “in a few things” of this life (vs. 5), always holding firm to God’s *great kindness*. He tested them, melting them down to rid them of impurities as the goldsmith purifies his ore. The saints unstintingly offered their lives to Him as holocausts. They were “whole burnt offerings” (vs. 6) on the altar of God, utterly consumed by immeasurable divine compassion and love.

Solomon testifies that the saints – both those honored in the Church and those known only to God – experienced His visitation from on high. “In the time of their visitation they will shine forth” in brilliance, running about like “sparks [burning] through straw” (vs. 7). Their lives were built on the foundation of Jesus Christ with gold, silver, and precious stones (1 Cor 3:11-12).

Today, when they visit us, their coming judges the nations, establishes the rule of God over peoples, extends blessings among the poor in spirit and the pure in heart, and provides healing and intercession for all. God reigns over His beloved saints now and forever (Wis 3:8). They never visit us except as servants of the Lord, meeting us only as those who challenge, teach, guide, and share their healing and blessed prayers for our endless good.

Let us therefore discern and welcome the presence of the saints, honoring them by trusting God as they teach us to do. The saints found truth in God by the grace and mercy of the Holy Spirit. We are baptized; we are illumined; we have received anointment with holy chrism. We are sanctified; we are washed in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. We are partakers of the all-holy Body and Blood of our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ, unto forgiveness of sins and unto life everlasting. Let us walk modestly, humbly, and thankfully in the company of the saints who plead for our salvation!

*Help us, O Christ our God, to stand among those who trust Thee, understand Thy truth, and continue faithfully in Thy love, O Thou Who givest grace and mercy to Thine own.* – From Wisdom of Solomon 3:9

**July 28 – Thursday – Wisdom of Solomon 5:15-6:3**  
**Third Reading at Vespers for Great Martyr Panteleimon**

**About the Saints: *Wisdom of Solomon 5:15-6:3, especially vs. 15:*** “*But the righteous live forever, and their reward is with the Lord; and their care is by the Most High.*” When Solomon speaks of the “righteous,” he is referring to those whose counterparts, in the New Testament era, are called saints. In Orthodox writings the godly personages of the Old Testament – prophets, seers, patriarchs, mothers and fathers – are usually described by the adjectives righteous, holy, or blessed.

Since the reading of this passage from the Wisdom of Solomon is prescribed at Great Vespers for important saints such as Panteleimon, you may be sure that the Church understands the term *righteous* to refer to those we know as saints. We understand that God will bless us by His holy ones because of three points that Solomon makes about them: 1) that they live forever; 2) that their reward is with God; and 3) that the Most High cares for them (vs. 15).

First, Solomon reveals that the righteous “live forever.” Enoch, one of the righteous mentioned in Genesis, “was well-pleasing to God, and was not found, for God translated him” (Gn 5:24). We may add to this report the scriptural account concerning Elijah. When he and Elisha walked and talked for the last time, “behold a chariot of fire appeared with horses of fire, and the fire separated them one from the other, and Elijah was taken up into heaven by a whirlwind” (4 Kgs 2:11). We learn of Melchizedek, a priest “forever,” in both the Old and New Testaments (Heb 7:3, Gn 14:17-20).

Let us set these exceptional instances aside for a moment, for Solomon does not limit his teachings on the righteous to this tiny number of notables. Rather, he gives an important lesson concerning eternal life for all that saints, including the majority who, like Moses, reposed and were buried. Why else would the Church read this passage at the feasts of martyrs such as Panteleimon, Euphemia, and Haralampos, who died for their witness? Why else would Saint John of Damascus plead in the funeral service for the soul of each one of God’s departed servants, that they be established “in paradise, where the choirs of the saints, and of the just, shine like the stars of heaven”?

Solomon speaks to this point when he says that the reward of the righteous “is with the Lord” (Wis 5:15). He affirms that eternal life is a gift of God to His saints – one of many divine gifts that lies beyond the capacity of we mortal sinners. For while we garner learning and acquire ideas from other men’s words, knowing the Lord is an entirely different kind of knowledge – it is an encounter with Christ our Lord. God freely showers love and many treasures on us. Is it not plainly so? We know He cares, for as Saint John says, “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (Jn 3:16).

Here we find evidence of the truth that indeed our “care is by the Most High” (Wis 5:15). We have reached the edge of a great, vast ocean. As Saint Romanos the Melodist chants: “The sea washes the brick, the great deep bathes the clay yet does not dissolve its composition, but compacts its substance and wipes clean its free will. See the attitude of the Maker; look at that of the Creator toward His creatures. They recline at table and He stands; they are nourished and He provides; they are washed and He wipes clean, and feet of clay are not smelted in the hands of the fire. Be merciful, merciful, merciful to us, You who are patient with all, and wait for all” (*On the Life of Christ: Kontakia*, p. 118).

*O Christ our God, who called the saints to salvation through the promises of blessings to come, sanctify our souls and bodies, cleanse our minds that we may attain to life eternal.* Evening Prayer

## July 29 – Friday – Kellia Reading – Daniel 7:9-12

**Judgment: Daniel 7:9-12, especially vs. 10:** “*The court was in session, and the books were opened.*” There is judgment in life, for sooner or later what we say and do comes home to roost. And there is judgment in death. As the Lord Jesus puts it, “But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment” (Mt 12:36). When we meet that final wall and this life ends, we shall answer to God.

“In the beginning Thou didst create man after Thine own image and likeness . . . to reign over Thy creatures,” writes Saint John of Damascus in the Orthodox funeral service. “But when, beguiled by the malice of the Devil, he tasted of the food . . . Thou didst condemn him to return again unto the earth whence he was taken, and to entreat repose.” There is judgment in eternity to which we contribute now – a judgment that becomes eternal.

Seeing heaven’s court in session and judgment meted out to the condemnation of Satan and his angels (Dan 7:11-12), the Prophet Daniel cannot stop watching. Let us be attentive to what our compassionate Lord and His prophet are telling us of this judgment to come. They describe a “whole life” accounting which will prove to be far more uncomfortable than the small comeuppances we encounter in our day-to-day affairs. Their words encourage us to repent often and deeply throughout this present life in order that we may prepare for what is to come.

When we are baptized, death’s power over us ends – at least from an eternal perspective. However, we are never given an absolute, cut-and-dried guarantee of eternal life. We receive “blessed purification through hallowed water” for sanctification, illumination, and remission of our sins. But we must also look to what we garner to ourselves through our subsequent words and deeds. So, first of all, let us give special attention to the Saint John of Damascus’ phrase, “to entreat repose.”

*Repose* is does not simply mean death, whether temporal or eternal – it is synonym for *rest*. It is possible that death may offer no rest, only eternal anguish resulting from an evil, unrepentant life. This truth is often glossed over at funerals out of a misguided respect for grieving friends and loved ones. Fortunately, the Orthodox Church does not overlook the reality that some of us pass our lives completely alienated from Christ. Such people may approach death with a false hope of finding bliss beyond the grave; perhaps they fantasize about reincarnation or anticipate only a blank, unconscious nothingness.

The step we take in baptism unites us to Christ, the deathless One who trampled down death. He shows us that these counterfeit notions of what comes after this life are hollow and empty, and gives us the possibility of eternal life. As the prophet says, “books were opened” (vs. 10). Judgment will be made, make no mistake.

The time for us *to entreat repose* is now. We are to prepare for the end of this life by making our beds well so that we may rest in joy. The choice to either repose in Christ or to separate from Him is made daily. The mystery of baptism purified us once; the mystery of penitence and confession can renew that purity through absolution. The fiery flame of God’s throne shows forth divine love, but it is not a sentimental love that glosses over the absolute holiness and purity of God. Judgment is final. Let us repent now.

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (Jn 3:16). “If anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins” (1 Jn 2:1-2). Christ promises to refresh us (Mt 11:28) – let us hasten to Him!

*Lead me to Thee, O Christ: to speak, to confess all, and to know Thy forgiving love.*

## July 30 – Saturday – Kellia Reading – Job 1:1-12

**The Ultimate Resource, Job 1:1-12, especially vs. 12:** “Then the Lord said to the devil, ‘Behold, whatever he has I give into your hand; but do not touch him.’” Saint Augustine of Hippo notes that “a man is observed, and the things which belong to him. No one knows of what sort he is. God sees of what sort he is. Sometimes he escapes even the devil himself. . . . [Job] escaped his sight because Satan was in darkness” (*On the Psalms*, NPNF, Vol. 8, p. 224). This truth is illustrated for us in the book of Job, for this God-given work illuminates our modern debate concerning culture vs. personality, and which of these is ultimately dominant in a person’s life.

The first verse of the text centers on Job: “That man was true, blameless, righteous, and God-fearing, and he abstained from every evil thing.” This summation of Job’s character is largely repeated in verse 8. Saint Hesychius of Jerusalem reminds us that “many call themselves man, but are not so in truth: for some live with bestial behavior, while other conduct themselves in the manner of reptiles” (Manley, *Wisdom, Let Us Attend*, p. 11).

Job, by all appearances, seems to thrive in an agriculture-based economy that allows him to flourish and prosper (vss. 2-5). Yet soon his material well-being and financial success will abruptly come to an end (vss. 13-22).

In verse 5 of this early tableau concerned with the material realm in which Job lived, we are told of the reason he is called a righteous and God-fearing man, who deliberately “abstained from every evil thing” (vs. 1). Despite his material success, because he is godly oriented, he carries out spiritual practices such as offering sacrifices for his sons and daughters, “according to their number, as well as one calf for the sins of their souls. For Job said, ‘Lest my sons consider evil things in their mind against God’ (vs. 5).

However, the narrative soon turns our attention away from the material realm and opens before us the spiritual realm of angels and the Almighty Father, “Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible” (Nicene Creed). Although the devil is a fallen angel, he comes on this particular day before God and the faithful and holy angelic beings.

The Lord, who sees all in every realm, confronts him, “Where did you come from?” To which the devil replies, “I came here after going about the earth and walking around under heaven” (vs. 7). Here is a reminder to us to be “vigilant; because [our] adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pt 5:8).

Ever the challenger of virtue and the mortal enemy of peace of heart, the devil insults God Himself, asking, “Does Job worship the Lord for no reason?” (Job 1:9). He tries to disturb God’s delight in Job by insinuating that God paved the way for Job’s moral and physical achievements by providing him with material success. He taunts, “But stretch out your hand and touch all he has, and see if he will bless You to Your face” (vs. 11).

As Saint John Chrysostom observes, “What impudence! He had the effrontery to enter into a dispute with God; yet this attitude was not only that of the demon, but it is that of malicious people. . . . The devil does not even touch the flock if he has not received authorization. . . . For he is far from God, [this] one who wants to make the righteous stumble” (Manley, *Wisdom, Let Us Attend*, p. 31).

Indeed, our enemy strives to destroy peace of soul. So let us guard against Satan’s attempts to decrease our conviction that “all good comes from God” and that we “can succeed in nothing without the help of His grace” (*Unseen Warfare*, 23).

*May we not to run around in quest of human wisdom, but act with the small power we have and leave the whole to God.* – Saint Dorotheos of Gaza

## July 31 – Sunday – Kellia Reading – Job 1:13-22, Tone 6

**The Source of Character: Job 1:13-22, especially vs. 22:** “*In all these events that befell him, Job did not sin at all before the Lord and did not impute folly to God.*” At the beginning of the Book of Job, the Holy Spirit describes the Prophet as “true, blameless, righteous, and godly, abstaining from everything evil” (Job 1:1). If we read carefully, we may perceive the source of Job’s character, of his righteous soul: in addition to natural human grief - in rending his garments and shaving “the hair of his head” - Job also “fell on the earth, and worshiped” (Job 1:20). The Prophet’s prayer reveals an unwavering dependence on God: “Blessed be the Name of the Lord” (vs. 21). The underlying assumption of Job’s life is that all things are of God, the Lord Who gives and withdraws as He chooses - and all are for one’s blessing (vs. 21).

Saint John Chrysostom holds up Job’s response as a mirror for our self-examination when he speaks of “the things many people . . . think when they see others enjoying happy days, while they themselves are plunged into the worst trials.” He notes that Job “has said nothing, nor has thought anything similar to men’s common complaints.” Rather, as Saint John points out, Job has withheld himself: “he has not accused the events of injustice. He has not said the happenings arrive without motive or by chance; he has not said: I am righteous, and I am not conscious of any sin; those people are thriving while I am plunged into innumerable evils, why? What injustice, what sin have I committed? Does God care about my affairs?” (Manley, *Job*, p. 48).

Job does not accuse life or chance of being unfair or unjust. Eschewing a litigious spirit, unlike many in America, the Prophet does not call his attorney for legal action against “the raiders,” (vs. 15) or against the horsemen (vs. 17). He worships God, and he does “not charge God with folly” (vs. 22). Look carefully at his assumption: Job sees life in the hands of God, so that whatever happens is *of God*. Thus, Job blesses God in the spirit that “every good and perfect gift is from above, and cometh down . . . from the Father of Lights” (see Jam1:17).

There is no trace of a resignation to fate or chance with Job. “The earth is the Lord’s and the fulness thereof, the world, and all that dwell therein” (Ps 23:1). Indeed, the Prophet David’s words are his: “All things has Thou subjected under [man’s] feet” (Ps 8:6). Job’s godly view of life and the world opposes any theory that perceives randomness as the director of life.

Further, to all that follows in the book of Job, the prophet does not seek to associate every negative event to some specific sin of his personal life. He accepts that bad things happen to good people, having implicitly in himself the conviction that Saint Paul states explicitly: “the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain” (Rom 8:22). We live after the Fall, not in Paradise. So Job does not agonize endlessly asking himself, “What injustice, what sin have I committed?” (Job 1:22). The beauty of Job’s heart manifests naturally when he falls “on the ground” (vs. 20). As Metropolitan Theoliptos said of prostration: “it provides an image of man’s fall into sin and expresses the confession of our sinfulness” (*The Philokalia*, 4, p. 185).

Unquestionably, there is great loneliness in pain and affliction. A wall rears up around those held in the clutches of suffering. The Lord Himself tasted this isolation, as He asked His beloved Peter, “Could you not watch one hour?” (Mk 14:37). And Job, like the Lord, knew that whatever befell him, the hand of God was upon the events. He knew that God cared about his affairs and had not cast him aside. “The Lord gave, the Lord has taken away” (Job 1:21). There is no suffering that any of us endure from which God stands apart, for our God and Savior, Jesus Himself, tasted great pain as a flesh and blood man in His Passion for our Salvation.

*I am the work of Thy hands. Grant me Thy helping grace, and endow me with patience and strength to endure tribulations with submission to Thy will.*