

**October 1– Saturday – Exodus 40:1-5, 9, 14, 28-29**  
**First Reading at Vespers for the Protection of the Theotokos**

**The Protection of the Theotokos: Exodus 40:1-5, 9, 14, 28-29, especially vs. 28:** “Then the cloud covered the tabernacle of testimony, and the tabernacle was filled with the Lord’s glory.” We are prompted by David the Prophet to “worship and fall down before . . . the Lord who made us. For He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand” (Ps 94:6- 7). However, our Lord does not accept whatever we devise as *orthodox* (correct teaching or right worship). Beginning with His people under the Old Covenant, God details precisely when, where, and how He is to be worshiped (Ex 35-39).

In this reading, He summarizes His commands for the establishment of the tabernacle or tent used for worship (vs. 40:2), its furnishings (vss. 3-5) and consecration (vs. 9). “Thus Moses did; according to all the Lord commanded him, so he did” (vs. 14). After Moses has carefully obeyed, “the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle” (vs. 29).

The centerpiece of the Mosaic “tabernacle of testimony” (see vss. 2, 5, 28, 29) is the ark (vss. 3, 5). Like our icons today, the Ark of the Covenant visibly reminds God’s people of His constant presence. Stone tablets inscribed with the Ten Commandments are kept in the ark along with a jar of manna, reminding them of how they were fed during the sojourn in the desert. Also included is Aaron’s staff that budded at God’s command. The unseen Lord reveals Himself through this visible *ark of the testimony*, disclosing how He ever defends His people against misfortune. When the Aaronic priests carry the ark in procession around the walls of Jericho, it heralds Him as Israel’s true protector (Jos 6:5-8).

On October 1 we celebrate the feast of the Protection of our Most Holy Lady the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary. Why is she called protectress, and how does she protect? Why do we honor her as a *shelter* over the people of God? The answers to these questions can be found in the origins of this feast.

Sometime during the reign of Emperor Leo IV (AD 886-912), an all-night Vigil was being celebrated in the Church of the Theotokos in Blachernae, a district of Constantinople. Standing among the multitudes was “Saint Andrew, the fool for Christ’s sake, [who] lifted up his eyes and beheld the pure Virgin Theotokos standing upon the clouds praying, shining like the sun and sheltering the people” (*Great Collection of the Lives of the Saints* vol. 2, p. 10). According to the Vespereal service for the feast, “she spread out her most sacred and holy veil, protecting the pious flock and filling all with her heavenly gifts of grace.”

Why was this wonder revealed in this way to a holy ascetic in the midst of a temple dedicated to the Theotokos? Saint Demetrius of Rostov replies: “That it might be shown how our most good Mediatress hastens to our aid in the hour of evil, when we are nigh unto perdition, and shelters us from the fleeting and deceptive glitter of the vanity of this world, from the voices of the pride of life and vainglory, from the thunder of the enemy’s sudden assaults, from the quakings of the passions, and from the chastisement which hails down upon us from above on account of our sins” (*Great Collection* vol. 2, pp. 10-11). Heeding our pleas, she hastens to our aid as a kind intercessor, for she has motherly privilege with her Son and our God, Christ the Savior. Do not fail to seek her aid!

*Come all ye lovers of Christ and draw forth the gifts of grace from the all-pure Protection of the Virgin’s august veil; it gusheth forth with bountiful health for the soul and it healeth the body’s ills, while giving shelter to all that with guileless faith ask in prayer that they be granted help.* – Orthros of the Feast of the Protection

**October 2 – Sunday – Exodus 3:1-8, Tone 7**

**Second Reading at Vespers for the Protection of the Theotokos**

**Dread and Christ: Exodus 3:1-8, especially vs. 5-6:** “So He said, ‘Do not come any closer. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground.’ . . . Moses then hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.” As children of this age, the pervasive ideas and assumptions of our culture necessarily influence our thoughts and actions. Even Saint Paul, a fierce critic of first-century Greco-Roman culture, struggled with a similar problem: “For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. If then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice” (Rom 7:15-19).

It is distasteful to know that anti-Christian influences shape our thoughts, words, and actions – the realization is both embarrassing and humbling! Not only do we see the corrupting aspects of secularism all around us, but we realize that these dark values are at work in our very bones. They cause us to act in ways contrary to Christ our God, whom we love and strive to obey. Such cultural influences have an insidious power, in the original sense of the Latin root word *insidiae*, meaning “to sit in.” Before this word became part of the English language, it acquired the extended meaning “to ambush.” Truly, secularism *sits in* on my life and *ambushes* me. Lord, “from my secret sins cleanse me” (Ps 18:12).

We find encouragement in the account of Moses turning aside to “see this great sight, why the bush is not consumed” (Ex 3:3). Something extraordinary catches his attention: fire ignites a scrubby plant in the dry heat of the Sinai desert, yet does not reduce the leaves to ashes. How can this be? Immersed in our secular ways, why are we not consumed by the fire of divinity when we partake of the Eucharist? “O dread mystery! O the compassion of God . . . that I, an earthly creature, partake of the divine Body and Blood and am made incorruptible” (prayer at the anaphora). We witness this amazing report from Exodus occurring in our own persons. Like Moses, we hear God calling us by name “from the midst of the bush” (vs. 4). What can we say to our Maker, Creator, and Judge – the Lord of all the earth? Like Moses we cry, “Here I am” (vs. 4).

And when we meet God, “ineffable, inconceivable, invisible,” we are warned not to approach: “Do not come any closer. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground” (vs. 5). Indeed, it is a fearful thing to meet the living God. We who are impure encounter Him whose eye cannot behold iniquity. God speaks directly to us, and we have only one reaction: we are “afraid to look at God” (vs. 6). Dread wells up – why are we not consumed? We should be reduced to ashes, yet we are not.

Instead, He speaks consoling words to us. Worldly and secular as we are, He nevertheless chooses to reveal extraordinary sights and brings us to our right mind. Ours is a God of compassion: “Indeed, I have seen the affliction of My people in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrow. So I came down to deliver them” (vss. 7-8). Christ understands our plight, for he was born into a culture that assaulted and afflicted Him. In His mercy He cares for us even in our shame and humiliation.

*Adorn me, teach and enlighten me. Show me to be a dwelling-place of Thy Holy Spirit.* – Prayer of Thanksgiving after Communion

**October 3 – Monday – Ezekiel 43:27-44:4**

**Third Reading at Vespers for the Protection of the Theotokos**

**Three Offerings: Ezekiel 43:27-44:4, especially vs. 27:** “*It will be when these days are over, on the eighth day, the priests shall offer your whole burnt offerings and your peace offerings on the altar, and I shall accept you,*’ says the Lord.” This passage belongs to the elaborate vision that God gives to his prophet (the full text begins at Ezekiel 40:1). What Ezekiel beholds is a preview of “the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem . . . the general assembly and church. . . registered in heaven” (Heb 12:22-23).

We learn that the holy table standing in the center of the sanctuary of the great city of the Lord should be put into service only after a full week of preparatory offerings (Ez 43:18-26). On the eighth day, once all is ready, two additional kinds of offerings are to be presented: “whole burnt offerings and . . . peace offerings” (vs. 27). The reference to the *eighth day* indicates that the glorious altar in Ezekiel’s vision will come at the moment of God’s choosing, and for our salvation.

If we seek to differentiate between the three kinds of offerings that Ezekiel describes, the whole message becomes clear. Let us begin by noting their liturgical order. First, *sin offerings* to the Lord are repeated for seven days. These oblations make atonement for sins, so that nothing will prevent communion with God (vs. 23).

Then follow the *whole burnt offerings* (vs. 27). These sacrifices express the worshiper’s total commitment of self to God. Nothing is held back before the Lord, but every aspect of our lives is handed over to Him. Finally, *peace offerings* are presented to God, to be enjoyed in an exalted state of communion with Him.

The order of Ezekiel’s vision foreshadows the progression practiced by those who observe the full life in Christ. First we confess our sins to God, in the mystery of confession. Confession is the primary effort we can and must make toward the cleansing of heart and soul – although forgiveness ultimately rests with the Lord and depends upon His great mercy. Second, during the offertory of the Divine Liturgy, immediately following the Great Entrance, we pray that God will accept our “oblation and whole burnt offerings” (Ps 50) as a sacrifice of righteousness. At this point we fully surrender all that we are and all that we have to the Lord our God.

Lastly, the priest presents “Thine own of Thine own . . . in behalf of all and for all” – our “rational and bloodless offering” of worship to God. In this final offering, which relies entirely upon the mercy of God, we beseech Him to “send down Thy Holy Spirit upon us and upon these gifts here spread forth.” We beseech the Lord that our offering of praise and thanksgiving will bring to the Church “peace, safety, honor, health and length of days.” In reverence and gratitude, we ask the Lord to “impart unto us [His] immaculate Body and precious Blood” with the fervent hope that He will accept us as communicants with Him.

These three acts of offering form the pattern of life for every person who seriously seeks after God and truly desires to know, love, and serve Him. Christ graciously meets us when we humbly enter His heavenly temple, worshiping Him from the heart and freely presenting these essential offerings. He alone visits us from on high, “from the east of easts,” and enters the darkness so that we may find our Truth, our Way, and our Life – Christ our God, born of the Virgin Theotokos for our salvation.

*Thy mystery is inscrutable, O Savior; hear us: O incomprehensible Lord, glory to Thee!* – Orthros Hymn for the Nativity of Christ

## October 4 – Tuesday – Kellia Reading – First Maccabees 1:1-15

**The Seleucids – Aggression and Watchfulness: 1 Maccabees 1:1-15, especially vs. 11:** “*In those days lawless men came forth from the sons of Israel, and they persuaded many, saying, ‘Let us make a covenant with the Gentiles surrounding us. . . .’*” The fifteen verses in today’s reading introduce us to a series of readings from chapters 1-4 of the First Book of Maccabees. The three Books of Maccabees record the struggle of the Jews against Greek paganism following the conquest of Egypt and the eastern Mediterranean by Alexander the Great (356-323 BC). After Alexander died, Judea became part of the vast kingdom of Seleucus Nikator (358-281 BC), one of Alexander’s heirs. A century later Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-164 BC), a descendant of Seleucus, set out to extinguish the religion and culture of the Jews altogether. His policies led to the martyrdom of the seven Maccabean brothers, along with their mother Solomona and the Scribe Eleazar (2 Mc 6:18-7:42), and ignited an armed Jewish revolt.

These introductory verses divide into three distinct sections that describe: 1) the swift extension of Greek authority over the region conquered by Alexander (1 Mc 1:1-7); 2) the unfolding of evils under the new pagan rule (vss. 8-10); and 3) the complicity of certain Jews who actively sought to covenant with the purveyors of the new ruling culture (vss. 11-15). This passage encourages us, in prayerful reflection, to assess how the surrounding culture of our own time may be corrupting the primary covenant that we have with Christ our God.

The first section of verses summarizes the life of Alexander fairly objectively. Notice that there is little in the way of negative language or derogatory color. The Macedonian came; he saw; he conquered; he bequeathed his empire to his friends; and he died. The record is straightforward. Alexander the Great was a conqueror in every way, one who fought wars, overcame fortresses, slaughtered kings, went to the ends of the earth, took spoils – and he was ruthless. If we think of other world conquerors (Tamerlane, Genghis Khan, Julius Caesar, Attila, Napoleon, Hitler) we see that they all shared Alexander’s style and dreams. They are a warning about the destructive potential of belligerence, which urges us to defeat others in order to fulfill greed and acquisitiveness.

These passions, when coupled with the gift of persuasion, can wreak great evil within the soul if left unchecked. After Alexander, evils spread throughout his empire; they “multiplied on the earth” (vss. 9-10). Far worse is the inner calamity that overtakes a person who indulges and pursues his passions. Life is short, and the decision to take the path of conquest often shatters hearts and souls.

Critical for every servant of God, given our unavoidable struggle against the passions, is prayerful watchfulness. This ascetic labor can prevent us from violating the holy, life-giving covenant in which we stand, and from covenanting “with the Gentiles surrounding us” (vs. 11). As long as we are in this life we remain liable to sin – to being lured by the promises offered to us by those who do not know and profess Christ.

The danger is real; we can fall away from “the good word of God and the powers of the age to come” (Heb 6:5). Archimandrite Ioannikios reminds us that “our hearts are ‘weighed down’ by many and different causes. What can redeem them from that disastrous evil? Christ’s commendation: ‘Take heed to your selves,’ the attention, that is, the watchfulness which the Lord stresses in other words further down: ‘Watch therefore at all times praying’ (Lk. 21:36)” (Gentithes, *Themes from the Philokalia*, vol. 1, p. 14).

*O most loving Christ, Who dost ever await my return, keep me watchful and save me.* – Pre-communion prayer of Saint Basil the Great

## October 5 – Wednesday – Kellia Reading – First Maccabees 1:16-28

**The Seleucids, continued – Desecration: 1 Maccabees 1:16-28, especially vs. 25:** “There was great mourning everywhere in Israel. . . .” These verses record how the pagan king Antiochus IV Epiphanes assaulted the temple of the ancient people of God after defeating the Egyptian armies (vss. 17-19). He robbed the Jews’ most holy place, stopped their sacrifices and feasts, and required them to participate in pantheistic worship.

Earlier in his reign, Antiochus had replaced the rightful high priest, Onias III, with Onias’ brother Jason, who was sympathetic to the king’s Hellenizing. However, just before the war with Egypt, Jason’s associate Menelaus gave the king the “right price” for the high priesthood, and Antiochus appointed him to the position. Because he was not of the lineage of Aaron, but rather from tribe of Benjamin, this “appointment” was a scandal to the pious (see Lv 12:10-15).

Orthodox Christians may empathize with the pain and offense experienced by the ancient people of God at the sacking, desecration, and stripping of the Temple. Its “sanctuary . . . golden altar . . . lampstand, [and] all the utensils” (Mc 1:21) were consecrated to God! The priests – and especially the High Priest – were “most holy to the Lord” (Ex 30:1-10). In the same manner, our own churches, icons, liturgical vessels, and priests are holy to God. We know in our hearts that we are to come near them with reverence, for they are vehicles of our knowledge of God.

The awe that the Jews felt (and that Orthodox Christians likewise know) in relation to holy things, persons, and practices derives from the fact that through these tangible forms the Lord discloses Himself to the hearts and minds of the faithful. Worship is reserved for God alone, but the veneration of the holy things used in worship is natural and right. How deprived are those who have not opened their hearts to the living God! We find great joy in standing before His holy presence in awe and reverence. As Bishop Kallistos Ware states, “Unless we start out with a feeling of awe and astonishment – with what is often called a sense of the ‘numinous’ – we shall make little progress on the Way” (*The Orthodox Way*, p. 14).

There have been many leaders in history who, without knowing God, were determined to inflict their beliefs, ideologies, and false religions on the faithful. History is replete with the enemies of God and their acts of desecration. Orthodox Christians grieve to this day the conversion of Hagia Sophia into a mosque and then later into a museum by the Turks. Equally painful is the memory of the many churches that were closed or destroyed by the Bolsheviks, who confiscated holy vessels and icons and imprisoned or executed many clergy, monastics, and devout laypeople.

One must see firsthand the consequences of vandalism and desecration of the treasures of God, or witness an unprovoked assault on a priest or bishop, in order to appreciate the horror that wells up when one encounters hatred of divine things. Still, we should not be surprised that such acts occur. Rather, we should address the lack of piety that we ourselves often display amidst the beauty of God’s holy house during moments of disrespect, indifference, or boredom. If the repetition of the prayers or the presence of icons, gleaming vessels, and vested clergy becomes something to be taken for granted, we need to shake ourselves awake. Let us slow down and honor the Lord who speaks to us through them. “Holy things are for the holy” has many meanings!

Icons of the Lord and His saints are spotless treasures – let us reverence them. God has forgiven us in Christ Jesus – let us then bow down to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Christ our God ascended the Cross to taste death and break its power – let us stand in awe before Him. God fills us with joy by coming to save the whole world – let us worthily sing His praises.

*May I glorify Thee, O God of all power, one in essence, most blessed and Holy Trinity.*

## October 6 – Thursday – Kellia Reading – First Maccabees 1:41-53

**The Seleucids – Politically Incorrect: 1 Maccabees 1:41-53, especially vs. 52:** “Many of the people . . . forsook the law, joined together and did evil things in the land.” Every national policy that imposes an arbitrary set of inhuman values on a population is a tragedy. The Spanish Inquisition, the French Revolution, the Soviet purges, the Nazi New Order, and the legalization of abortion are blots on our race. Our familiarity with such infamous assaults can help us grasp the significance of the scheme devised by the Seleucid king to eliminate the wisdom offered to His people by the life-giving God.

At various times in history the pressure to conform to legal wrong has been largely indirect, promoted through propaganda and isolation. The Seleucids, however, determined to gain their objectives completely, so “that whoever did not obey the word of the king would die” (vs. 50). Today, the media is one of the means of working against the teachings of our holy faith with its God-given truths and divinely received wisdom. More overt forms of force may eventually follow.

Indeed, the pressures that oppose the life in Christ are mounting. No sooner was the bankruptcy of Marxism and Nazism checked than the proponents of secularism and humanism began advancing their agenda to eliminate all revealed truth. Now it is our turn to stand faithfully against the present onslaught that would bend justice in the courts and make God’s truth illegal. Many are the invitations to *forsake the law* and to *do evil things in the land* (vs. 52). Be prepared to defend the truth against the advance of pernicious falsehood!

Discernment is surely required if those committed to Christ as King and God wish to avoid succumbing to the winds of “political correctness.” The Divine Liturgy is our first line of defense for receiving guidance from God. Through His word, and by means of the Church’s sacred Tradition and holy mysteries, we are able to survive a host of dark, subtle pressures.

The pursuit of truth is often diminished by seemingly innocuous decisions. Let us shut off the radio and TV, for there is little innocence and purity to be found in popular television, pop music, and the glib talk heard on every side. The situation is critical today for faithful lovers of Christ. Few of us remain entirely free of the polluting lies spreading among us. May God aid us in rising up to attend Church at midweek for worship and classes, instead of staying home to watch and listen to lies. “Help us, save and have mercy upon us, and keep us, O God by Thy grace.”

Give us the grace to tune out the popular media and instead read Scripture and the profound works of the Fathers of the Church, both ancient and contemporary. We can decide to immerse ourselves in materials profitable for heart and mind. May God lead us to spend more time with our children and help them identify the lies and fads that invite them to discard God’s truth, so that they may make God-pleasing decisions.

Forgive us, O God, for even thinking that we might “forsake [our] customs” (vs. 42) and the life of the Church. Forgive us for accepting social teachings that sound good on the surface but subtly erode Orthodox truth. Forgive us for the times when we consented to false religious practices, when we “sacrificed to idols” – such as social acceptance – and “profaned the Sabbath” (vs. 43), or when we neglected to follow the word of the living God in our daily lives. May we never fear to be politically incorrect in speaking against abortion, euthanasia, and same-sex unions, and let us oppose every trend toward doing whatever feels good, belittling God, and mocking holiness.

*I believe, O Lord, and I confess that Thou art truly the Christ, the Son of the living God, Who didst come into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.* – Pre-communion prayer

## October 7 – Friday – Kellia Reading – First Maccabees 1:54-64

**The Seleucids, continued – Upholding the Faith: 1 Maccabees 1:54-64, especially vs. 64:** “*And great wrath came upon Israel.*” As we read about the oppression of the Israelites under Seleucid rule, we Orthodox Christians ought to consider how we are to remain faithful to the Lord. For nearly a century after Alexander’s conquest, daily life among God’s people remained relatively free. An abrupt shift in state policy promoted paganism and ruthlessly attacked Jewish faith and practice. Today, likewise, many policies opposed to God’s truth are being promoted in the societies in which we live.

Following the initial Greek conquest, Judea was ruled by Egyptian kings descended from Ptolemy, one of Alexander the Great’s generals. Life was fairly prosperous and the authorities tolerant. Many Jews adopted Greek as their first language. During this era, Hebrew scholars living in Egypt translated the sacred Scriptures of the Old Testament into Greek, a translation known as the Septuagint and still used by the Orthodox Church today.

In Judea, the high priest continued to serve under the protection of the crown of Egypt. However, when the Seleucid king Antiochus IV attacked Egypt (1 Mc 1:16-20), Judea passed under his control. As the present reading reveals, the Seleucid regime made an all-out effort to eliminate Israel’s religion. The state-sponsored violence that marked Seleucid rule may be absent from contemporary cultural conflicts in North America today, but we can find parallels in secularist attacks by the media and in the rulings of some courts and agencies.

The Seleucids blatantly “set up the abomination of desolation on the altar of the whole burnt offerings” (vs. 54) in order to force sacrifices to Zeus. When swine’s flesh was offered in the Temple and across the land, devout Jews were horrified.

Antiochus’ officials further suppressed education in traditional godly beliefs and practices, for “when they found books of the law, they tore them to pieces and burned them in the fire” (vs. 56). Today, we see controversies over public school curricula when the schools teach values contrary to the truth that the Church upholds. Belief is excluded from the arena of secular education – either because it cannot be proven or measured, or because it contradicts current scientific theories.

Last but not least, the Seleucids vigorously promoted indulgence in the passions. In response, “many in Israel grew strong and determined in themselves not to eat unclean things. They chose rather to die than be defiled by foods or profane the holy covenant” (vs. 62-63). Today, our popular culture and media promote self-indulgence as *the* correct life-style, effectively inviting the faithful to abandon fasting, prayer, and ascetic discipline and to spurn chastity and faithful marriage.

We still enjoy opportunities to oppose this aggressive secularist-humanist agenda at the ballot box, in court, in our parish communities, and in family life. We the faithful need to inform ourselves about how current issues impinge on our faith, so that we may show our loved ones the dangers inherent in any trend or teaching aimed at undermining the traditional practices of the Church. Watch, for the night is at hand! Since we are “alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. . . . do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead” (Rom 6:11, 13).

*O Lord, our God, assist us in serving Thee in true holiness and faithfulness throughout this present life, so that we fail not finally to attain Thy heavenly kingdom in the age to come.* – from *The Orthodox Missal*

## October 8 – Saturday – Kellia Reading – First Maccabees 2:1-14

**Mournful Repentance: 1 Maccabees 2:1-14, especially vs. 14:** “Thus Mattathias and his sons tore their clothes, put on sackcloth, and mourned exceedingly.” Saint John Climacus writes, “Mourning according to God is sadness of soul and the disposition of a sorrowing heart, which ever madly seeks that for which it thirsts; and when it fails in its quest, it painfully pursues it, and follows in its wake grievously lamenting” (*Ladder of Divine Ascent* 7.1, p. 70). This definition of God-given mourning from the holy abbot of Sinai matches precisely the wrenching response of Mattathias and his sons to the degradation of their godly heritage.

Thirsting for holiness, Mattathias sees instead many “blasphemies taking place in Judah and Jerusalem” (vs. 6). His soul plunges into grief at our sorrowful human condition. As a man and a priest of God, he even despairs of life in the wake of the disaster wreaked upon the holy land of Judah by its conquerors.

Mattathias is among the most strict and pious of God’s ancient people. His heart is wounded by the violence of the Seleucids in their determination to unify the kingdom of Antiochus IV Epiphanes. Mattathias sees everything God calls holy being laid to waste: the holy city, the Temple, its sacred vessels, even innocent babes. However, Mattathias’ mourning is not sorrow alone, but *mournful repentance* – a grief that includes every element of genuine godly sorrow arising from sin and wrong. The pious neither stand apart from the grief and wrongs of others, nor do they suffer evil as merely a deplorable loss.

Those who fear God perceive every event contrary to His will as an affront against the Lord Himself. Mattathias perceives the tragedies around him as sins in the eyes of God. He thus mourns for sin’s victims, for its perpetrators, and for himself. The natural, healthy reaction to sin is always mournful repentance or godly sorrow (1 Cor 7:10).

Consider the conditions over which Mattathias and his sons mourn – what he calls “the ruin of my people” (1 Mc 2:7). The people witness the murder of the inhabitants of Jerusalem during a truce (vs. 1:30) and the sacking of that *holy city* by the Seleucid collector of tribute (vs. 31). The Temple of God falls “into the hand of foreigners” (vs. 2:7) and becomes a place for pagan rites of the most desecrating kind (vs. 1:46) – that very sanctuary from which God excludes the unconverted. “Her glorious vessels were carried away into captivity” (vs. 2:9).

Added to all this, Mattathias witnesses “her infants . . . slain in the streets, her young men with the sword of the enemy” (vs. 9). Upon discovery, every circumcised male baby is immediately killed by the Seleucids (vs. 1:60). Each of these deeds is contrary to God’s will, as stated explicitly in the Law: “You shall not murder. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor” (Ex 20:13,15,16).

We, too, ought to repent when such deeds occur, rather than merely excoriating those who committed the crimes as if we stood apart. When we do this we are not excusing sin, but rather admitting that evil thoughts, urges, and desires arise in our own hearts and minds.

Repentance is urgent and appropriate. Hence, Mattathias cries, “Why was I born to see this . . . ruin” (1 Mc 2:7); he “and his sons tore their clothes, put on sackcloth, and mourned” (vs. 14). Theirs is not grief “according to the flesh;” the very words *blasphemy* and *desecrated* (vss. 6, 12) reveal that such grief describes true, mournful repentance before God.

*Open to me the doors of repentance, O Life-giver; for my soul goeth early to the temple of Thy holiness, coming in the temple of my body, wholly polluted.* – Lenten troparion

**October 9 – Sunday – Kellia Reading – First Maccabees 2:15-30, Tone 8**

**Zeal: First Maccabees 2:15-30, especially vs. 27:** “Everyone who has zeal for the law and holds to the covenant, let him follow me.” Zeal is great ardor or enthusiasm for a cause, characterized by energetic action toward the realization of one’s desired goal. Zeal is not necessarily virtuous: there is holy zeal, but also ardor combined with action not in accord with God’s will. Only zeal grounded in knowledge that embraces God’s will (Rom 10: 2-3) fully accords with the Lord’s purpose and methods.

In King Saul we find an example of misguided ardor that results in his “bloodthirsty” killing of the Gibeonites (2 Kgs 1). He exercises “his zeal for the sons of Israel and Judah,” but ignores the oath of protection that “the sons of Israel had sworn” to the people of Gibeon (vs. 2).

By contrast Phinehas, the son of Aaron and nephew of Moses, evinces a godly zeal. He sees an open breach of the divine covenant when God’s people defile themselves by “committing fornication with the daughters of Moab” (Nm 25:1), participating in fertility rites, eating sacrifices, and worshipping idols. After a man of Israel takes a Midianite woman, Phinehas pursues the couple and “thrusts both of them through” with a spear – an act that halts a plague that had killed 24,000 (vss. 7-9). The Lord declares that it was Phinehas’ action that “stopped My wrath from among the children of Israel when he was zealous with My zeal among them” (vs. 11). It is crucial to act in accord with God’s will in all things.

Isaiah prophesies of the coming of Christ, the Son who will bring God’s government of “righteousness and judgment, from that time forward and unto ages of ages [with] the zeal of the Lord of hosts” performing it (Is 9:6). When Christ acts against “those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers doing business” in the Temple (Jn 2:14), His zeal reveals Him as the very Son of whom Isaiah spoke. His actions call to mind Psalm 68:12: “Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up” (Jn 2:17).

In the present reading, Mattathias’ godly zeal is already burning in him like a pious flame when he first encounters the apostasy to be enforced by the officers of King Antiochus (1 Mc 2:15). They come to Modein in order to extend the vile worship of their idol Zeus – including even the devotional offering of swine. Mattathias is horrified by the reports of their actions in Jerusalem, in God’s holy Temple, but now this loathsome worship is proposed in his very presence.

A fellow Jew commits a blatant, sacrilegious act, submitting to apostasy in full view of the residents of Modein. When the apostate comes forward to fulfill the pagan king’s tyrannous, unholy decree (vs. 23), zeal ignites in Mattathias’ heart as from a pilot light. He slays his countryman, “kill[ing] the king’s man who wanted to offer sacrifice . . . and he tore down the altar” (vs. 25) because “he had zeal for the law” (vs. 26).

In effect, Mattathias initiates a revolt against the Seleucids and begins a war of religious independence. He and his sons “fled into the mountains and left behind whatever they had in the city” (vs. 27), while “many who sought righteousness and judgment went down to the desert to live” and fight together with them (vs. 28). His zeal for God touches off revolt, in a place and time where there are no other options for seeking redress against tyranny.

*O Christ our God, Who gave Thyself to redeem us from all iniquity, and purify us to Thyself as a people, zealous of good works, fill us with holy fervor for Thee. – based on Titus 2:14*

## October 10 – Monday – Kellia Reading – First Maccabees 2:31-48

**Tactics in Spiritual Warfare: 1 Maccabees 2:31-48, especially vs. 39-40:** “Then Mattathias and his friends . . . said . . . ‘If we do as our brothers did and fail to fight against the Gentiles for our life and our ordinances, they will quickly wipe us off the earth.’” When we united ourselves to Christ and spat on Satan during our baptism, the priest prayed to God that we would remain “warriors invincible in every attack of those who assail us; and make us all victors, even unto the end, through Thy crown invincible.” Satan’s legions are still at large (1 Pt 5:8) and we are under assault. It is easy to choose the wrong tactics and lose our victory in Christ, for “this is the hardest fight of all wars, since in fighting against ourselves it is in ourselves that we meet opposition” (*Unseen Warfare*, pp. 80-81). Right tactics are truly essential.

Let us look carefully at some wrong tactics, such as hiding in the desert of our wills and bright ideas (1 Mc 2:31); relying on the fantasy that innocence alone is invincible (vs. 34), or self-confidently failing to repulse the lures and attacks of the enemy (vss. 36-38). “They died . . . a thousand people. Then Mattathias and his friends grieved for them exceedingly” (vss. 38-39).

But these survivors, along with the strict Hasideans, did more than grieve; they resolved to fight every “man who comes against us for battle . . . and not . . . die as our brothers did in their hiding places,” and to gather as “a mighty army from Israel, everyone who willingly offered himself” (vss. 40-42). Here we see a more effective set of tactics for use in spiritual warfare.

According to Saint Paisios, God lets “the devil loose up to a point and for a specific time, so that the devil can help us with his malice, by tempting us and sending us running to God for help. . . . If nothing good will come out of it, He will not allow it. God permits everything for our own good; we should believe this. He lets the devil be so that many may keep up the fight. No pain, no gain” (*With Pain and Love for Contemporary Man*, pp. 64-65).

The example of the people of God in the age of the tyrant Antiochus ought to encourage us greatly. As secularism predominates our present-day culture, we are seeing what a state of misery the devil is in. “Even when you see a decent person become a criminal, you feel so sad. Imagine what we would feel if we were to see, not what has happened to a man, but to an angel. . . . You see, the fall of Adam was countered with God’s coming to earth, the Incarnation. The devil’s fall can be countered only if he is humbled. But he cannot be corrected, because he does not want to” (*With Pain and Love*, p. 67).

Facing the onslaught of Antiochus against their faithful practices, the ancient people of God responded. “Everyone who escaped from evils was added to them and became their support” (1 Mc 2:43). Support for each other in the fight against temptation, sin and surrender to evil is not only important, it also is essential. They formed an army, not in order to dominate and exploit, but to strike “the sinner in their wrath and the lawless men in their anger” (vs. 44). Mattathias and his allies also “surrounded the [pagan] altars and tore them down” (vs. 45). They did what they could to curb the invasion and resist the ungodliness and depravity.

Further, they sought to raise their youth according to the will of God (vs. 46). They dubbed their brethren who submitted to the pagan rites “sons of arrogance” (vs. 47). “They took the law out of the hand of the Gentiles and the kings and did not allow the sinner to dominate them” (vs. 48). Indeed, “the greatest enemy of our souls, greater than the devil himself, is the secular spirit” (*With Pain and Love*, p. 71).

*The Lord is God and king over all the earth . . . let us worship and fall down.* – Psalm 94: 3, 6

## October 11 – Tuesday – Kellia Reading – First Maccabees 3:1-24

**Strength From Heaven: 1 Maccabees 3:1-24, especially vs. 19:** “For victory in battle does not come from the size of the army, but from the might of heaven.” The present reading begins with a tribute to a great soldier of God. We see Judas Maccabeus putting on his breastplate, girding himself with armor for combat and wielding his sword (vs. 3), and hear descriptions of his earlier campaigns against Seleucid forces (vss. 10-12,13-24). His triumphs point to the truth that the people of God receive their strength from heaven, a truth incomprehensible to the worldly mind.

Saint Nikolai of Zicha marvels at the accomplishments of another small warrior band: “Twelve men of simple birth and trade, having no . . . earthly glory or might [who left] their homes and kinsfolk and set out over the whole world. . . . This is something completely new, and . . . cannot be explained by anything other than by God’s help, God’s collaboration, and God’s grace” (*Homilies*, vol. 2, p. 1-2). There is strength from heaven.

Judas Maccabeus understands and accepts that he is a warrior of the Lord, fighting with the Lord’s strength for the Israel of God (vss. 1-2). As we read, we are reminded that every one of us is a warrior who depends on the Lord. Let us refuse to surrender to the prevalent delusion that Christians are simply members of an organization who enjoy occasional fellowship, lovely prayers, and beautiful worship that is entirely incidental to the battles of life. Such is not the case at all! We are armed as warriors under steady attack from Satan and his foul spirits who, in pride and arrogance, would *seize us* (vs. 20). These enemies are far more capable than earthly enemies and seek to destroy us by means of guile, idolatry, concupiscence, deceit, and uncleanness.

The apostles and Church Fathers often refer to this *unseen warfare*. We “do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph 6:12). No less a warrior than Saint John Chrysostom begs us to remember Christ’s warning concerning our spiritual battles. We must “not grow careless or over-confident, but . . . struggle on out of fear. For a person derives no benefit from the other virtues, even though he dwells in heaven, if he is in the grip of the presumption that led to the fall of the devil, Adam, and many others” (*Philokalia* vol. 3, p. 270-1).

Let us be watchful and alert, like Judas Maccabeus, and prepare ourselves for the predictable sorties of our mortal enemy. Judas Maccabeus, when he learns of the pending attack of Apollonius, “went out to meet him. He struck and killed him” (1 Mc 3:11). He expects attack; he is watching for it. He does not wait passively and allow the enemy to exploit his weaknesses. Immediately he goes on the offensive, aware of the advance of the enemy. Satan always is probing our minds, suggesting vile thoughts and sending his demons to worry us, mock us, and arouse sinful passions. Let us develop the watchfulness of soldiers and keep our perimeter posted and alert. When the first hint of the enemy comes, we will then face him with strength from heaven.

If we are deluded like Seron, the Seleucid ally, and begin to think that in spiritual warfare we will receive “a name for [ourselves] and be honored in the kingdom” (vs. 14), then we will be fighting in madness. Judas Maccabeus, as a soldier of God, realizes that “it is easy to hem in many at the hands of a few, and it makes no difference before heaven to save with many or with few” (vs. 18). We do not rely on ourselves. As the Prophet David, another great warrior of God, says, “For by Thee shall I be delivered from a host of robbers, and by my God shall I leap over a wall” (Ps 17:29). Victory belongs to the Lord alone. He gives unearthly strength from heaven.

*I will love Thee, O Lord my strength; the Lord is my foundation, and my refuge, and my deliverer. My God is my helper, and I will hope in Him, my defender.* – Psalm 17:1-2.

**October 12 – Wednesday – First Reading at Vespers for the Fathers of the Seventh Council – Genesis 14:14-20**

**When Truth Prevails: Genesis 14:14-20, especially vs. 14:** “Now when Abram heard his brother Lot was taken captive, he armed his three hundred and eighteen trained servants, born in his own house, and went in pursuit as far as Dan.” At the dawn of history, during the age of the Old Testament patriarchs, Chedorlaomer was the king of Elam. Today, Elam is a small plateau in the southern piedmont area shared by Iran and Iraq. During his reign, Chedorlaomer somehow wielded an influence much greater than the breadth of his kingdom. He was, in fact, overlord of most of western Asia between the Mediterranean and the mountains of modern Iran (vss. 14:1-5).

The early verses of this chapter describe the capture of Abram’s nephew Lot, and Lot’s family, by a coalition of forces under Chedorlaomer. These loved ones seem doomed to disappear forever into the oblivion of slavery, until the righteous Abram mobilizes a small fighting reserve from his household. Abram sets out after a proven combat group that already has subdued much of the Middle East, having crushed a rebellion by five former vassals of Chedorlaomer, “four kings against five” (vs. 14:9).

What should we make of the account of Abram’s victory, which the Church assigns on the eve of the Sunday of the Fathers of the Seventh Ecumenical Council? First, we note that Abram, like the Fathers of the Seventh Council, wins his victory with a small band of God’s servants. These servants defeat a powerful coalition that has long opposed the people of God and the Lord’s truth. Both victories are marked by 1) unquestioning trust in God’s prompting, 2) darkness, which ironically contributes to the defeat of God’s enemies who rely upon it, and 3) liturgical worship and thanksgiving by the people of God.

Abram’s victory comes as a result of the patriarch’s trust in the power of God. Saint John Chrysostom observes, “The Patriarch prevailed against them not by physical strength but through faith in God. He achieved all this under the protection of help from on high, not by wielding weapons and arrows and spears or by drawing bows or raising shields but with a few retainers of his own household” (*ACCS*, Old Testament vol. 2, p. 24).

Likewise, when the Seventh Ecumenical Council supported the Empress Irene in declaring that icons “should be set forth in the churches of God,” the victory at first seemed short-lived, since the forces favoring iconoclasm far outnumbered those supporting the restoration of the icons. Irene was exiled in AD 802, apparently ending hopes for the return of the icons. However, in AD 843 another empress dowager, Theodora, reversed her late husband’s iconoclast policies, and Patriarch Methodios declared the sacred images lawful. Victory came because of the persistent faith of those who trusted that icons are of God.

Abram achieves victory because his small band comes upon Chedorlaomer’s armies encamped *by night*. They use the cover of darkness to smite and pursue them (vs. 15). Likewise, the darkness of iconoclasm was defeated by the light of saints such as John of Damascus and Theodore the Studite, for “the Light . . . is never overtaken by night.”

The victory of God’s truth over death and the darkness of error results from the faithful cooperating with the grace of “God Most High, who [delivers] your enemies into your hands” (vs. 20). As the Prophet David says, “The Lord is my light and my savior, whom then shall I fear? The Lord is the defender of my life; of whom then shall I be afraid?” (Ps 26:1).

*In Thee is the fountain of life, in Thy light shall we see light. O continue Thy mercy unto them that know Thee, and Thy righteousness unto the upright of heart.* – Festal Hymn based on Psalm 35:10,11

**October 13 – Thursday – Second Reading at Vespers for the Fathers of the Seventh Ecumenical Council  
Deuteronomy 1:8-11, 15-17**

**Resolving Disputes: Deuteronomy 1:8-11, 15-17, especially vs. 17:** “*You shall not show partiality in judgment; you shall judge the small and the great; you shall not shrink before any man’s presence, for the judgment is God’s. The case too hard for you, bring to me, and I will hear it.*” Sadly, at time quarrels and disputes arise within the Church. Such contentions have taken place over the past two thousand years in spite of the active, healing ministry of Christ, who “is our peace” (Eph 2:14), and despite the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, from whom comes “the fruit of . . . love, joy, peace” (Gal 5:22).

When God’s people trouble each other with lawsuits (Dt 1:12), such actions are contrary to our Lord Jesus’ will! He came to “reconcile [us all] to God in one body through the cross” (Eph 2:16). Nevertheless, disputes occur. Quarrels, fights, and all-out wars are part of a dark tragedy that persists throughout the history of the human race.

We may trace this bitter contentiousness to the dawn of time, when Cain slew the righteous Abel (Gn 4:8). The prophets, apostles, evangelists, and Church Fathers teach that the underlying cause of human disputes is sin, which brings death. For “through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men” (Rom 5:12).

The Prophet Moses, who understood the universal evil of sin, graciously provides a basic means for settling disputes within the community of the faithful. Simply put, Moses instructs the people of God to choose “wise, understanding, and experienced men” as “leaders over you” (Dt 1:13).

Within the Church, we have a hierarchical body of pastors to settle disputes. Patriarchs, archbishops, metropolitans, bishops, and priests are ordained and elected to serve *over* us (vs. 15). In every nation and society, these worthy men serve as our fathers in God. At their ordinations we pray that “the grace of the all-holy Spirit may come upon them,” and we continue to pray during the Divine Liturgy “for all the clergy and the people” that the peace of Christ truly may reign among us in a healing, life-giving, and saving manner.

Because of the forgiveness that Christ accomplished through His Passion and through the active work of the Holy Spirit, the leadership of the Church hears disputes and often resolves strife, so that peace is restored through the seeking of a common mind in the Lord Jesus (Phil 4:2). Because those who are appointed to serve as heads are fallible men like ourselves, the Church has a hierarchical ladder of appeal for the laity and the clergy. Should any “case” prove “too hard,” higher councils of pastoral responsibility may *hear it* (Dt 1:17) and provide guidance and light from the Lord.

Such was the Seventh Ecumenical Council, a gathering of hierarchs of the Church who resolved iconoclasm, a raging conflict of church and state that led to many people being martyred and exiled during a one hundred and fifty year period (AD 717-843). The holy Fathers of this council truly were “luminous stars upon earth, and through them [God] did guide us unto the true Faith” (festal hymn), which includes “making . . . pictorial representations, agreeable to the history of the preaching of the Gospel” (Thornton, *The Oecumenical Synods of the Orthodox Church*, p. 113).

The solution Moses established still blesses the people of God, aiding all deliberations that arise from quarrels within the Church. The Church strives to avoid partiality, since “the judgment is God’s” (vs. 17). It is only through His truth that the fathers of the Church are able to settle disputes.

*Let us extol today those mystical trumpets of the Spirit, namely the God-mantled Fathers, who sang in the midst of the Church a hymn of unified tones, teaching the Triune Godhead.* – Vespers Hymn for the Feast

**October 14 – Friday – Third Reading at Vespers for the Fathers of the Seventh Council  
Deuteronomy 10:14-21**

**Yesterday, Today, and Forever: Deuteronomy 10:14-21, especially vss. 20-21:** *“You shall fear the Lord your God; you shall serve Him, and hold fast to Him, and take oaths in His name.*

*He is your boast and your God. . . .”* Many people today, dazzled by the possibility of “reinventing” themselves, perceive no limits on what they can become. “Be everything you can imagine,” they tell themselves. The illusion that we can define ourselves is as old as the human race. Christians, however, recognize that its source lies in the song of the serpent, who used identical “sales talk” to deceive our first parents into believing that they could “be like gods” (Gn 3:5). This fatal error has wreaked havoc on mankind ever since.

How different is the wisdom of the Prophet Moses, who urges us to “fear the Lord your God . . . hold fast to Him, and take oaths in His name” (vs. 20). We must not overlook Moses’ counsel on the grounds that it is addressed to an ancient people who lived before our Savior had appeared. The prophet’s words are meant for God’s people. They apply to us now, even as they did to our forebears in faith, for God is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

The God of whom Moses speaks is the same Lord to whom we direct our prayers in the Divine Liturgy. Never say that the Lord has changed! The material culture of the ancient Near East differs greatly from the technological environment spinning around us today, but God is unchanged. Moses speaks of the God to whom belongs “heaven and . . . also the earth and everything in it” (vs. 14).

Rest assured that “the Lord chose your fathers to love them; and He chose . . . you above all nations, as it is this day” (vs. 15). Look at Christ our God as He appears in the icons of Extreme Humility and the Harrowing of Hades. Let us never doubt that God has set His heart toward us in love. And such love, such extraordinary love, is for us and for every people without exception.

After the coming of Christ, baptism replaced circumcision among the people of God. The issue of stubborn hearts, however (vs. 16), is as much our problem as it was for ancient Israel. Let us ask God to expel from us “every evil and impure spirit” that would make its lair within us (baptismal prayer).

Moses stresses the connection between God-as-He-is and the way we respond to the defenseless among us. God is great, mighty, and terrible, yet He “shows no partiality nor takes a bribe” (vs. 17). He “administers justice for the resident alien, the fatherless, and the widow, and loves the resident alien, giving him food and clothing” (vs. 18). We know well what it means to be an alien, for we too were once “aliens in the land” of our own *Egypt* (vs. 19).

Christ reveals Himself as the icon of the invisible God. We in turn are icons in Him, but only if we manifest our true nature by acting as much like God as we are able. The Apostle John reminds us that only he who “loves is born of God and knows God” (1 Jn 4:7). As God is impartial, let us not show any “partiality among [ourselves]” (Jas 2:4).

Moses reminds God’s ancient people that they are to “fear the Lord your God . . . serve Him, and hold fast to Him” (Dt 10:20), because “He is your boast . . . [who] did these great and glorious things for you” (vs. 21). How much more God does for us through Christ: the “Cross, the grave, the Resurrection on the third day, the Ascension into heaven, the session at the right hand and the second and glorious advent” (Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom).

*Come let us worship and fall down before Christ. Save us O Son of God, Who art risen from the dead, who sing to Thee: Alleluia.* – Hymn at the Little Entrance

## October 15 – Saturday – Kellia Reading – First Maccabees 3:25-41

**Final Solutions: 1 Maccabees 3:25-41, especially vss. 34-35:** “[Antiochus] gave [Lysias] orders concerning all his wishes and concerning those who lived in Judea and Jerusalem. . . . to destroy them and remove the might of Israel and the remnant of Jerusalem, and to remove their memory from that place.” The annals of history overflow with the names of those who devised a “final solution” concerning the people of God: Pharaoh, Antiochus IV, Diocletian, Hitler, Stalin, and the Islamic fundamentalists. Yet Jews and Christians survive to this day, while those who would *remove their memory* have become historical examples of the futility of opposing the will of God.

As we examine the policy of Antiochus outlined above, we recall how the chief priests and Pharisees responded to reports that Jesus of Nazareth had raised Lazarus from the dead. They said, “This Man works many signs. If we let Him alone like this, everyone will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation” (Jn 11:47-48). Their fears impelled them toward a final solution: “It is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish” (Jn 11:50).

Mankind’s final solutions inevitably involve force: chariots, armies, deportations, special camps, and executions. Hovering behind these somber histories is the specter of death. In the present passage, note the size of the army that Lysias gathers to carry out his king’s orders. It includes “elephants” and “forty thousand infantry and seven thousand cavalry” (vss. 34, 39). We should not forget that God the Life-giver has His own *final solution* to the mad efforts of such fanatics who would rule by raising the specter of death. God’s final solution raises the banner of life, resurrection, victory, peace, and blessing!

Above all, let us remember the apostolic admonition that “whatever things were written before were written for our learning” (Rom 15:4). We ought to be cautious and humble before God in the event that we, like King Antiochus, should find our plans frustrated and opposed. The hand of God is never absent from human activity, whether on the grand scale of history or in the routines of our everyday lives. God is Lord “and we are the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand” (Ps 94:7).

When our will is opposed and frustration builds up inside us, we may be sure that it is our own sin and the promptings of demons that arouse fear within. See how *very angry* Antiochus becomes at the reports of Judas’ battles and victories (1 Mc 3:26, 27). His pride is aroused and he plunges into frantic action. When frustration and anger arise, let us heed Saint John Climacus: “Pride is utter penury of soul under the illusion of wealth, imagining light in its darkness. The foul passion not only blocks our advance, but even hurls us down from the heights” (*Ladder of Divine Ascent* 23.29, p. 141). Let us beware of our own “final” solutions!

The Seleucid king clearly feels secure in his elephants and “all the forces of his kingdom” (vs. 27), and he fails to see how the finger of God has disrupted his scheme to force a false religion upon Israel. At least the magicians of Pharaoh’s court recognized that God was at work in the plagues on Egypt, but no such words of caution are spoken to Antiochus.

When things fail to work in our favor, it is time to seek the Lord and hear from Him the same words that Joshua received: we have “sinned and transgressed the covenant” (Jos 7:11). Let us pray, repent, and amend our words and deeds. In this way we will avoid becoming like Antiochus – a dark, bitter thread woven into the background of God’s bright, life-giving, and saving redemption of mankind.

*To Thee I come, O Christ, blinded in my soul’s eyes, crying unto Thee in repentance, Thou art the light of transcendent radiance to those who are in darkness.* – kontakion of the Sunday of the Blind Man

## October 16 – Sunday – Kellia Reading – First Maccabees 3:42-60, Tone 1

**Maccabean Triumph – Preparing for Battle: 1 Maccabees 3:42-60, especially vs. 53:** “How will we be able to stand against them if You will not help us?” Circumstances sometimes converge to pit individuals, families, and nations against an overwhelming enemy who would annihilate them (vs. 42). This happened among a small, devout group of God’s people – a tiny minority of believers in ancient Judah, merely one district within the huge, populous Seleucid empire of King Antiochus IV. The king determined that his subjects “were to be as one people (1 Mc 1:41), who must “obey the word of the king” or die (vs. 50). The aged priest Mattathias resisted the royal decree, out of loyalty to God’s holy commandments, until his death. His sons continued the revolt under the leadership of the third oldest brother, Judas Maccabeus. He initiated a series of guerrilla actions against the local officials of King Antiochus with great initial success.

The rebellion enraged Antiochus (vs. 3:27). He ordered the extermination of Judas’ followers and assigned the task of genocide to Lysias, his viceroy (vs. 32-36). The obedient minister dispatched a great army under three generals with “forty thousand infantry, and seven thousand cavalry” into Judah to “crush it according to the king’s orders” (vs. 39). The Seleucid forces encamped near Emmaus, twenty-five miles west of Jerusalem. Numerically and militarily, their army far outclassed Judas Maccabeus’ tiny band of guerrillas. Judas and his fighters came face to face with a grave life-and-death threat.

All believers at times face difficulties similar to the one which confronted Judas Maccabeus. How do we meet those situations that affect our very life and faith? Such situations are not limited to military attacks, but also include the difficult emotional, and spiritual choices that arise from our encounters with debilitating disease, addiction, dissension, poverty, infidelity, unscrupulousness, divorce, malice, lying, betrayal, and cruelty.

In the description of Judas Maccabeus’ preparations for battle, we discern a wise plan with guidelines appropriate to any believer who is stricken by insuperable problems. First, let us be of one accord. As one of the Maccabeans says, “Let us repair the ruin of our people and battle for our people and the sanctuary” (vs. 43). May we likewise accept our problems, state goals worthy of God, and forgo all whimpering, wringing of hands, and passive submission.

Judas and his followers “gathered to prepare for battle and to pray and ask God for mercy and compassion” (vs. 44). No Christian should ever act alone, apart from the Church. Note that, along with prayer, the Maccabeans *fasted* (vs. 47). We have been given fasting, prayer, and other ascetic disciplines to aid us in standing with Christ, that we too may “keep the faith inviolate . . . crush underfoot the heads of unseen tempters, [and] emerge victors over sin” (Divine Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts).

Next, the people “opened the book of the law” (vs. 48) and searched for God’s light. They reviewed before the Lord the military engagements forced upon them by the king’s unbending command to destroy their faith and life (vss. 49-52). They *appointed rulers* and sent home those who were not prepared to fight (vss. 55-56). Every facet of our own difficulty should be carefully and humbly examined in the light of God’s wisdom, so that it may be seen through His eyes. Only then will we surrender whatever hampers us from following the Lord into His hands.

Ultimately, the Maccabeans entrusted the outcome of their battle plans to the will of God (vss. 53, 60). Having done all that we can, let us likewise act in a God-pleasing manner and rest in His perfect will.

*O Lord, in all perplexities, grant us the grace of Thy Spirit to ask what Thou wouldest have us to do, and save us from all false choices, that in Thy straight path we may not stumble.* – adapted from the Book of Common Prayer

## October 17 – Monday – Kellia Reading – First Maccabees 4:1-25

**Maccabean Triumph, continued – Saving Israel: 1 Maccabees 4:1-25, especially vss. 10-11:** “Let us cry out to heaven to see if the Lord will be with us, and remember the covenant of our fathers, and crush these forces before us this day. Then all the nations will know that He is the Redeemer and Savior of Israel.” In the New Testament we find positive references to soldiers and an acceptance of military might. For example, John the Forerunner tells soldiers not to “intimidate anyone or accuse falsely, and to be content with your wages” (Lk 3:14). A centurion asks the Lord Jesus to heal a servant “who was dear to him” (vs. 7:2) – and the Lord heals the servant and praises the faith of the officer. Nevertheless, the Lord offers no resistance to the soldiers who arrest Him. His counsel to “love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you” (Mt 5:44) encourages us to abstain from conflict whenever possible.

However, at times negotiation becomes impossible. No options remained for conflict resolution between the Seleucid king, who was bent on the complete destruction of God’s people, and the followers of Mattathias. Mattathias moved from Jerusalem to Modein to evade the king’s demands that he desecrate God’s laws (1 Mc 2:1). The king’s officers then came to Modein in order to end traditional religious worship and to require God’s people to offer swine in sacrifice to idols (vs. 2:15). At first, Mattathias spoke peaceably against the order to “follow the decree of the king” (vs. 18). He exclaims, “Far be it from us to forsake the law and the ordinances. We will not obey” (vs. 21-22). However, when a fellow Jew moved to offer pagan sacrifice, Mattathias struck back (vss. 24-25).

These events led this pious Jewish minority into war with the great Seleucids. An army was dispatched to quell the Maccabeans. Given its size, training, and equipment, the king’s army appeared fully capable of annihilating them. There was no more room to negotiate, and surrender was impossible – the alternatives were extermination or resistance. Like their forebears pursued by Pharaoh and his chariots to the Red Sea, Judas Maccabeus and his men discovered their dependence on God and called on Him to again deliver their small band of the faithful rebels (vss. 4:9-11).

And yet, as Saint Nikolai of Zicha says, “Preparation is like a proposal to God; but it is God, not the proposer, who decides” (*Prologue From Ochrid* vol. 2, p. 339-40). Centuries later, in AD 1453, the beleaguered defenders of Constantinople were forced to surrender to the superior forces of the Ottoman Turks. Fortunately, as Bishop Kallistos Ware notes, life under the new infidel rulers proved bearable for the Christians, for “the Turks . . . treated their Christian subjects with remarkable generosity” (*The Orthodox Church*, p. 87). The defeat of the White Russians by the Bolsheviks, although it led to unimaginably brutal repression, failed to exterminate Orthodoxy in Russia.

We indeed admire peacemakers, but let us humbly recognize those who put their lives in mortal danger on the battlefield in defense of the holy faith. Before his defeat and martyrdom by the superior Islamic forces in Kosovo, Tsar Lazar of Serbia said: “It is better for us to experience death, than to live in shame and slavery” (Velimirovich, *Mystery and Meaning in the Battle of Kosovo*, p. 25). God saved the Maccabeans “for His mercy endures forever. Thus great deliverance happened to Israel on that day” (vss. 24-25). God sometimes acts in miraculous ways. He may or may not save us from a particular peril, but whether we live and die He supports our efforts to gain eternal life and offers us His great mercy.

*O our God, Who loveth mankind, Who art ever gracious and conciliatory, keep Thy holy Church and all men from wrath, fire, the sword, foreign invasion, civil war and sudden death.* – Doxology for the New Year

**October 18 – Tuesday – Kellia Reading – First Maccabees 4:26-40**

**Maccabean Triumph, continued – The Present Life Is Bittersweet: a Maccabees 4:26-40, especially vss. 36, 37, 38:** “Behold, our foes have been crushed. Let us go up to purify the sanctuary and renew it.’ Thus the entire camp gathered and ascended to Mount Zion. They saw there the sanctuary deserted, the altar desecrated, and the doors burned down.” Today’s passage describes a crucial victory of the small Maccabean militia against the army of the vast Seleucid empire. Chafing at an earlier defeat (vss. 4:1-25), the Seleucid viceroy now approached Judea not from the west, as in earlier campaigns, but from the south.

In the ensuing battle the Maccabean brigade prevailed against Lysias’ grand army (cf. vss. 34-35; 2 Mc 6:11-15), regaining control of Jerusalem, the Temple, and Judea (1 Mc 4:36-40). Victory was bittersweet, however, for they found the Temple wrecked. They prostrated themselves in grief and cried out to God. The victory opened a period of limited sovereignty for the ancient people of God beginning in 163 BC, during which time Mosaic worship and national freedom seemed within their grasp.

Shortly after the Maccabean victory, the Seleucid Empire began to unravel under attacks from the Parthians to the east and the Roman dominance to the west. The brief respite enjoyed by Judea resulted more from distractions on the Seleucid imperial frontier than from any claim to military superiority. Gradually divisions arose among God’s people. A dynasty of Hasmonean Jews ruled for a time, but declined as a result of famine, coups d’état, and palace intrigues. Next an Idumean, Herod the Great, took the throne. Ultimately Herod’s dynasty – and Jewish national sovereignty – collapsed as Christ foretold (Mt 24:1-2). The Jews revolted against the Romans in AD 66; the Temple was destroyed in AD 70, and no sovereign Jewish nation would arise again until 1948.

The Maccabees enjoy the sweet taste of victory over the Seleucids, an achievement recognized by the Church as an act of God. However, when they “ascended to Mount Zion” (1 Mc 4:37), bitterness mixes with triumph. They find the sanctuary “deserted, the altar desecrated, and the doors burned down” (vs. 38). Such is the nature of the life of God’s people in this fallen world. Both in Old Testament times and in the Christian era, the people of God often suffer under hostile regimes and experience the desecration of their temples and martyrdom for the faith.

The desecration of a holy place is a shocking and heart-rending sight. Whether such desecration results from vandalism, war, decay and neglect, or the actual seizure of churches by the enemies of God, it is a painful reminder of the limits of worldly force. Judas and his followers see the ruined temple, and immediately they “fell on their faces on the earth, sounded the signal on the trumpets, and cried to heaven” (vs. 40). They face the bittersweet side of worldly power: cleanup, reconstruction, and all-too-brief times of pure worship while offering “praise and beauty . . . before [God’s] holiness and majesty . . . in His sanctuary” (Ps 95:6). May we learn from this recurring history that Lord’s true Kingdom is not of this world (Jn 18:36)!

As we praise and worship God, let us remember that some will desert the faith. Some congregations will fail, churches will close, and the freedom to worship will be periodically lost. In all circumstances, let us ever “prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Rom 12:2).

*O gracious Lord, increase Thy mercy upon us, that with Thee as our Ruler and Guide, we may so pass through things temporal, that we lose not finally the things eternal.* – Book of Common Prayer

## October 19 – Wednesday – Kellia Reading – Joshua 1:1-11

**Into the Land: Joshua 1:1-11, especially vss. 1-2:** “After the death of Moses, the Lord spoke to Joshua the son of Nun, the assistant of Moses, saying, ‘Moses my servant is dead. Now therefore arise, you and all this people, and cross over Jordan into the land I will give them.’” The crossing of the ancient people of God into the Promised Land across the waters of the Jordan portends what lies before each baptized Christian. We pass through the waters with promises not yet realized, and we are to expect protracted warfare against enemies who are antagonistic and well-armed. For Israel, those enemies were the Canaanites (named after their cursed forebear – see Gn 9:18-25; 10:15-20). For us, united with Christ in the Jordan of our baptism, we constantly face the forays of Satan and his demons into our hearts and minds, those green pastures promised to us by God.

The initial verses of Joshua contain God’s directives to him “and all this people [for crossing] over Jordan into the land I will give them” (Jos 1:2). As specific orders from God, they apply to every servant of Christ who desires to carry out the will of our gracious Lord and Master. We who are pledged as warriors in the holy mysteries of our Savior Jesus Christ have sure promises from God. Let us observe the Lord’s commandments carefully, for there are dangerous enemies waiting to foil our attempts to attain the divine Kingdom!

First, we must appreciate the God-ordained battle plan given to ancient Israel (vss. 1-4). (Consult a map of the Holy Land if you wish to trace the boundaries of the territory the Lord outlines in these eleven verses.) For us, God’s plan reveals how we are to “maintain the shield of our faith unassailed by the enemy” (service of chrismation). In every role we choose to accept in this life, or that may befall us – student, spouse, worker, lay member, clergyman, teacher, parent, doctor, lawyer, prisoner – the Lord is ready to help. We need only embrace the orders He gives, following them in prayer and ascetic labor, aided by the nourishing of the holy mysteries. In so doing we shall by God’s grace “preserve pure and unpolluted the garment of incorruption, wherewith we are endowed” (chrismation prayer).

These instructions may have seemed overwhelming to Joshua and Israel, yet what the Lord promises them, He also assures to us: “I will be also with you. I will not forsake you nor disregard you” (vs. 5). His promise is personal, using the intimate forms of speech (“thee” and “thou”) in the original. Let us trust God Who makes us “worthy to take refuge under the shelter of His wings” and thereby to “deliver . . . us from all tribulation, wrath, danger, and necessity,” even if we have to pass through momentary afflictions (prayer for the reception of catechumens).

Have you ever become discouraged while serving God as a faithful member of Christ? As the Lord encourages Joshua, so He is ever encouraging us: “Be strong and courageous, for you will divide this land which I swore to your fathers to give them” (vs. 6). No matter which part of the effort God may assign to us, He says the same to all: “Behold, I have commanded you. Be strong and courageous. Do not be cowardly or fearful, for the Lord your God is with you in all things, wherever you go” (vs. 9).

Take note that our Lord directs these commands to every single one of us, “that [we] may have understanding to do” (vs. 8) what He commands through Moses and the prophets, and most especially through our Lord Jesus Christ, His holy apostles, and the Fathers of the Church. Meditate day and night on what we have received from Him through them! Then we too shall know how to do all that God requires. “Then you will both prosper . . . and have understanding” (vs. 8). Ours is not to temporize, but to trust and obey.

*Keep me, and all of us Thy servants, in Thy sanctification, O Lord; deliver us from the evil one, and preserve us all in purity and uprightness, that we may please Thee in all we do.* – Chrismation prayer

## October 20 – Thursday – Kellia Reading – Joshua 2:1-11

**Rahab, Our Ancestor – Hiding the Spies: Joshua 2:1-11, especially vss. 4-5:** “*But the woman took the men and hid them, and she spoke to [the king’s messengers], saying, ‘The men came to me; but as the gate was being shut in the darkness, the men went out. I do not know where they went. Pursue them, if indeed you may overtake them.’*” The Apostle James declares, “Rahab the harlot also [was] justified by works, when she received the messengers, and sent them out another way” (Jas 2:25). How can he say that Rahab is justified? Does he overlook the fact that she lies to the king’s men, telling them that the spies departed “as the gate was being shut” when, in fact, she “hid them” (Jos 2:4-5)? Why does the apostle apparently gloss over her disloyalty to her king? Even more puzzling, how shall we understand the epistle writer’s assertion that this known harlot was *justified* by works?

We may arrive at a true understanding of Rahab’s justification by refusing, first of all, to entertain any notion that Saint James simply ignores scriptural evidence about her conduct. If nothing else, the entire witness of Scripture proclaims that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23). James has no illusions about Rahab; he knows the manner of her life in Jericho and that she saves the spies by means of deception.

Some scholars have proposed that the word “harlot,” as it appears in the original Hebrew, was derived from the root word *zun*, meaning “innkeeper,” rather than from *zana*, which means “harlot.” However, we know that the translators of the Septuagint were Jews who were well-versed both in Hebrew and in the Greek spoken by the dominant culture of their age. These pious men and scholars of the Old Testament deliberately chose the Greek expression *gynaikos pornes* to describe Rahab – literally, “unchaste woman” or “harlot.”

Thus, if we are to follow the Apostle James’ assessment of Rahab, we must not separate her actions from her discernment concerning God and Israel. She receives the spies, whom James calls “messengers,” and deliberately “sent them out another way” (Jas 2:25). The apostle emphasizes Rahab’s hospitality to these known enemies of her own nation. She knows exactly who they are and why they are visiting her city: they are reconnoitering prior to a military assault against Jericho (Jos 2:9-10).

What would cause a woman to hide the scouts of a foreign army preparing to attack her city? Where does her loyalty lie? The answer to this question reveals the basis of the Apostle James’ assessment of Rahab, for she deliberately chooses Israel’s interests over her own city and king. Yes, she knows the “facts on the ground” – these men have come “to spy on the land” (vs. 2). Is Rahab perhaps so marginalized by her profession that she has nothing to lose – nothing to prevent her from transferring her full allegiance to the invaders instead of the citizens who have been using her for self-indulgence?

When he alludes to Rahab’s actions, Saint James illumines a profound truth: faith and works are indissolubly linked. Faith is completed, i.e. made perfect, when we *act* on that which supports and furthers what our God-given faith *discerns*. Rahab’s faith does not rest on mere intuition – an assessment of relative military prowess or social advantage – but on a revelation from God (vss. 9-11). Faith leads her to choose the Lord and His people over natural loyalties. May we make our own choices likewise, first discerning God’s will and then taking action in support of its fulfillment, ever applying Christ’s words: “He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me” (Mt 10:37).

*Forgive us, O Master, and visit us in Thy goodness. Forgive us every transgression, both voluntary and involuntary, that, above all, we may serve Thee in holiness all the days of our life.* – Prayer of the Thrice-holy Hymn

## October 21 – Friday – Kellia Reading – Joshua 2:12-24

**Rahab, Our Ancestor – Use the Scarlet Cord: Joshua 2:12-24, especially vs. 18:** *“For behold, we will come into a part of the city and you will set a sign; you shall hang this scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down. Then you shall gather yourself and your father and mother and your brothers into your father’s house.”* In any conspiracy safety is imperative, as illustrated by these verses describing the alliance between Rahab and the spies of Israel. The scouts must avoid capture by the king of Jericho, for security of the army of Israel is at stake. And Rahab, in turn, needs assurance of her safety during the assault on the city, for she is risking her life to support the people of God.

A scarlet cord dangling from the window of Rahab’s house alerts every soldier in Joshua’s army of his duty to protect her life, her family, and her home during the destruction of Jericho. Let it also remind us of our obligation to protect each other as fellow members of Christ. The sacred narrative of Joshua commands each member of the people of God to look out for the other members, for every one of us faces cunning and deadly enemies of flesh and spirit.

No one who currently enjoys those “healthful seasons” and “peaceful times” that we pray for during the Divine Liturgy should imagine that the Church is safe from enemies. Let us remain ever aware of the deadly forces led by that unseen “king who rules over this world” – the very Jericho in which the Church finds itself in this life (Jn 16:11). God expects us to care for one another, just as blessed Rahab cares for the spies and they for her. The knowledge we have gained of the terrain of this fallen world must be used to save all those united to us in Christ, whether they are part of our natural families or among our brethren in the Church.

Rahab urges the spies to “go away to the hill country” (Jos 2:16) and hide in the rugged mountains and wilderness northwest of Jericho. She knows that the region is filled with caves and crevices that will conceal the men from hostile patrols. According to tradition, this region lies within the austere desert where our Lord Jesus was tempted after His baptism. In our own spiritual warfare, the Church and the Holy Mysteries serve as secure mountains where we may seek refuge, taking our loved ones inside with us. The Divine Liturgy and the other services of the Church provide safe havens against the enemy who seeks to capture and destroy us. Let us avail ourselves of ascetic discipline, Scripture reading, pastoral counsel, and the wisdom of the Church Fathers, for they are an effective defense against the machinations of darkness.

Rahab uses a scarlet cord to guarantee safety for herself and her loved ones. Likewise, we use tangible signs of our holy faith – a cross on the wall, icons in our homes and cars, a prayer book, a Bible, a candle – to awaken us to our sources of spiritual cover. All of these things are timely alerts against our dread foes.

Above all we should use the scarlet cord of prayer before God, asking for the intercession of His mighty armies of saints and bodiless powers. We remind ourselves of God’s promise that “I am your Protector.” Locks, insurance policies, and security systems have value, but they do not provide the ultimate spiritual cover: “I will dwell in Thy tabernacle unto the ages, I shall be sheltered in the shelter of Thy wings” (Ps 60:4). If we fail to use the scarlet cord of prayer or take refuge in the mysteries of the Church to protect ourselves, then we are venturing “outside the door of [our] house” where guilt can easily fall upon us (Jos 2:19).

*O God, our help, our only hope and refuge, we flee to Thee for relief and comfort, trusting to Thine infinite love and compassion to deliver us from all the assaults of the enemy. – Prayer in Time of Trouble*

**October 22 – Saturday – Kellia Reading – Joshua 3:14-4:7, 19-24**

**The Great Crossing: Joshua 3:14-17; 4:1-7, 19-24, especially vss. 6-7:** “When your son asks you tomorrow, saying, ‘What are these stones to you?’ then you will declare to your son, saying, ‘The Jordan River dried up before the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth when it crossed over’ . . .” In the mystery of holy baptism, the Church solemnly prays “that there may be sent down into [the baptismal water] the grace of redemption, the blessing of Jordan.” The great crossing of the Jordan River by the people of Israel, as directed by Joshua, forms a significant thread in the tapestry of Scripture. It connects and illumines what God provides, what the Church extends, and what each person receives when he enters the baptismal waters.

First and foremost, we understand the entrance of Israel into the Promised Land as a solemn and holy act of obedience on the part of the consecrated people of God. We repeat this passage every time the faithful process around the Church on Great and Holy Friday, and also at the baptisms traditionally performed on Holy Saturday. We read that “the priests carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord before the people” (vs. 14). Only when their feet “dipped in part of the water of the Jordan” (vs. 15) did God hold back the Jordan’s flow, containing the waters both above and below the procession marching across the riverbed (vs. 16). The Ark of the Covenant serves as a tangible and visual icon of the presence of the living God who leads, saves, and blesses His people.

The crossing into Canaan is a movement of the entire people of God. All traverse the Jordan on that day, and by His power God illumines them as a unique people of His choosing, designated to occupy the Promised Land. This historical moment is reflected in the Jewish baptisms required of Gentiles entering Israel, and most especially in the baptism of each member of Christ.

The baptismal service, which joins converts to the Lord’s Body in a common spiritual warfare in order to gain the Kingdom of God, culminates with a triple procession around the baptismal font. The passage through the Jordan and into the land of Canaan by God’s people signals the renaming of the land. Forever after Canaan is to be called Israel, after the common ancestor of God’s people. Let us ever remember that Christ our God, “the only sinless One,” deliberately unites Himself to us as man by His baptism in the Jordan – accepting even our sin and the ensuing curse of death, thereby opening life to us!

Note that Israel’s passage through the Jordan repeats the earlier passage through the Red Sea, a point explicitly stated in today’s reading (vs. 23). That earlier transit – from “the village opposite Baal Zephon” (Ex 14:9) across to the Sinai peninsula – ends the people’s slavery in Egypt, while the Jordan crossing bestows the *promise* of inheritance. We must emphasize, however, that this promise remains theirs to complete. All the battles to wrest the Promised Land from the Canaanites still lie ahead. Nevertheless, the people have arrived *in* the Holy Land. Both of these realities are contained in the baptismal mystery: our Lord delivers the newly baptized “from the bondage of the enemy” and receives each one into His heavenly kingdom.

Finally, Israel’s crossing, aided by the stemming of the river’s flow, serves as a witness that “all the nations of the land might know that the power of the Lord is mighty” (Jos 4:24). God’s people memorialize their entry into the land for future generations. The crossing serves as an evangelical event for everyone, who, like Rahab, embraces the gospel of our gracious God and Savior Jesus Christ, who opens His Kingdom to all and unites us to Himself.

*O our God, Thou hast revealed Thyself upon earth and walked among us. As Thou didst hallow the waters of Jordan, save all those who come to Thee and ever preserve Thy people.*

**October 23 – Sunday – Kellia Reading – Joshua 5:1-4, 8-12, Tone 2**

**The Fruits of the Land: Joshua 5:1-4, 8-12, especially vss. 10, 12:** “Then the children of Israel kept Pascha on the fourteenth day of the month at evening, to the westward of Jericho, across the Jordan in the plain. . . . And they enjoyed the fruits in the land. . . .” This passage is a type of the life in Christ, enabling us to compare Joshua’s narrative with the experience of being a Christian. The people of God enter the Promised Land by passing through the waters of the Jordan (Jos 3-4), just as all who unite themselves to Christ are baptized. Terror strikes the native residents of the land; as pagans in “the bondage of the enemy,” they are panic-stricken upon the arrival of the children of Israel (vs. 5:1). We may be sure that the unclean spirits are also disquieted when they are “rooted out, rebuked, expelled, and crushed down” during the rite of exorcism that precedes baptism.

Circumcision, the rite of initiation into the people of God (Jos 5:2-3), is replaced by baptism. God’s grace of purification – our deliverance from the powers of this world – is now extended to the whole Body of Christ (vss. 4, 8, 9). The faithful in the Lord likewise celebrate the eternal Pascha and partake of the bread of angels, the living bread (vss. 11-12).

When the Lord Jesus came “to the country of the Gergesenes, there met Him two demon-possessed men, coming out of the tombs, exceedingly fierce” (Mt 8:28). Note the reaction of the demons inhabiting the two wretched men. They cry out, “What have we to do with You, Jesus, You Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time?” (vs. 29). Even in the form of a man, the Almighty God is a terror to the principalities and powers who rule the affairs of this world.

When the demons – “the spirit of error, the spirit of guile, the spirit of idolatry and every concupiscence; the spirit of deceit and of every uncleanness which operateth through the prompting of the Devil” – are exposed to Christ, they beg to go away into the herd of swine (vs. 31). Likewise, the exorcism performed before baptism terrorizes Satan and his demons, casting them into torment.

The beginning of the new life in Christ is a dread moment for the evil one. His lair is exposed to the unapproachable light of Him who holds power over all creatures in His hand. The hearts of the kings of Canaan become crazed – “their minds fainted, they were panic-stricken” (Jos 5:1) – because they now experience the dread principalities of darkness that control them and rule through them.

Remember that baptism removes “the disgrace of Egypt” (vs. 9) from all who prepare to enter the life in Christ. Having wandered in the deserts of this world, every Christian rejoices at the lifting of the bondage of sin and the prospect of purity before God. Life in Christ illumines our past bondage. What a glory it is to say, “Christ is in our midst; He is and ever shall be!” These words express the great truth that slavery is over, although terrible battles and temptations lie ahead. There will be relapses, and new gifts of grace will be required if we are to attain the freedom of God’s Kingdom. Indeed, Christ warns that His Kingdom must be taken by violence (Mt 11:12).

Every Orthodox Christian knows that Pascha is the focal point of the whole year. On that day the usual trisagion is set aside, and we offer the special hymn, “As many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Gal 3:27). Every Lord’s Day is truly another taste of Pascha, when we enjoy the fruits of the land that we have entered. We receive “the communion of [the] Holy Spirit, unto the fulfillment of the kingdom of heaven” in the Holy Gifts. The manna of this world no longer satisfies us, for we receive the true Bread of Life which comes down from heaven to give us the great mercy of Life in Christ (Jos 5:12; Jn 6:33).

*In the gathering places bless ye God the Lord from the springs of Israel. O Son of God, who didst rise from the dead, save us who sing unto Thee. Alleluia.* – Entrance Hymn for Pascha

**October 24 – Monday – Isaiah 63:15-19; 64:1-5, 8, 9**  
**First Reading at Vespers for the Great Martyr Demetrios**

**Redemptive Suffering: Isaiah 63:15-19; 64:1-5, 8-9, especially vss. 63:15-16:** “Where are Your zeal and Your strength; where is the multitude of Your mercy and Your compassion, so as to be patient with us? You are our Father. . . .” In praying for his generation, Prophet Isaiah gives voice to the cries of countless generations of God’s suffering people. His words apply to the captives at Babylon and the Maccabean martyrs, and also to the host of martyrs for Christ, from the first to die for the Lord to those killed in the unrelenting persecution of the Roman Empire, the countless who suffered for our Savior under the oppression of Islam and Communism, right up to this present day.

As Hieromonk Damascene writes, “The Orthodox Christianity that we have received today was formed and nurtured. . . . in suffering and persecution, and it remains in that condition even today – when it is genuine” (“The Suffering, Catacomb Christianity of African America,” p. 18). Isaiah cries out for all of God’s faithful and suffering people.

But why should we limit the prophet’s words to those who are openly attacked for their faith in Christ? What of ascetic strugglers, the hungry, the poor, the sick? What of those in chronic pain or in marriages involving cruelty, infidelity or divorce? What of the unemployed, the imprisoned, the families torn apart by war or military service? In all these cases the issue remains the same: How do we maintain our bond with Christ in the face of whatever would separate us from Him, evoking despair and apostasy? Isaiah prays for all the faithful to find grace – to transform our suffering and make pain redemptive when it comes to us.

In suffering we naturally cry to the Lord, begging Him, “Return from heaven, and look” upon us (vs. 15). We trust Him, for in Christ we know that God is merciful and strong to help. His love and grace are beyond our feeble comprehension. He is zealous on our behalf, abundant in mercy, and overflowing in compassion (vs. 15). We are blessed to know God and call Him *our Father* (Mt 6:9), as Jesus our Lord directs us.

This is exactly the manner in which Isaiah speaks to Him (Is 63:16). So it is for us “from the beginning,” for at our baptism and chrismation His *name was signed upon us* (vs. 16)!

When we are suffering, it is healthy to look deeply into our errant ways, hardened hearts, and tepid fear of the Lord (vs. 17). May we, like Isaiah, quickly realize how often we use God’s gift of freedom as a spawning ground for sin and indifference to our gracious Father. We know all too well the temptation of Isaiah, for we accuse the Lord of being the source of our failings. Only when we wake up can we gladly join the prophet in begging our God to “return for the sake of Your servants, for the sake of the tribes of Your inheritance, that we may inherit a small portion of your holy mountain” (vss. 17-18). That mountain is the Church, the living Body whose head is Christ.

We long for God to open heaven in order that “trembling shall take hold of the mountains [of our sins] before You, and they shall melt as wax melts before the fire” (vs. 20) and “burn up the adversaries” (vs. 64:1) lodged in our souls. Who else can save us? “From of old we have not heard, nor have our eyes seen any God but You” (vs. 3), the Lord of compassion and forgiveness.

By God’s grace we admit the truth: “You were angry, for we sinned; therefore we went astray” (vs. 4). We are blessed to plead that He “not be exceedingly angry with us, and do not remember our sins in an opportune time. And now look upon us, for we are all Your people” (vss. 8-9). We find in suffering, as the Cross of Christ graciously reveals, a redemption to renew the *desert* and removes the *curse* from our lives.

*Help us to purify ourselves of every defilement, that in purity we may beseech Thee, saying, Rise, Lord, and save us; for Thou art the Lover of mankind.* – Orthros of Great and Holy Friday

**October 25 – Tuesday – Jeremiah 2:1-13**

**Second Reading at Vespers for the Great Martyr Demetrios**

**The Lord vs. Vain Things: *Jeremiah 2:1-13, especially vss. 2-3:*** “*I remember your compassion and youth and your love and maturity, so as to follow the Holy One of Israel, says the Lord. Israel, the beginning of His harvest, was holy to the Lord.*” In these verses God recalls Israel in the early years as a loving and obedient people. He contrasts them with the state in which He finds them during Jeremiah’s lifetime: an unfaithful people in revolt against Him, following “after vain and worthless things” (vs. 5).

This contrast may be applied to many other circumstances, including the conflict between Demetrios, young governor of Thessaloniki and a devout Christian, and the pagan Roman Emperor Maximian (AD 286-305). This senseless persecutor believed “that the repose of a saint could be like that of a sinner, for the death of sinners is evil” (*Great Collection of the Lives of the Saints*, vol. 2, p. 387). Let us use this contrast from the text of Jeremiah to measure the state of our lives against that of a devoted servant of the Lord such as Saint Demetrios.

God willing, we strive to keep Christ our Lord and Savior in our hearts with deep reverence, joining our souls to Him. We must never cease “to follow the Holy One of Israel” (vs. 3), allowing Him guide us in every circumstance of life. Certainly the Great Martyr Demetrios was such a person. He learned that Emperor Maximian was coming to Thessaloniki to punish him for not following orders to cleanse “the city in which you were born . . . of the impious Christians” and “put to death all who call upon the name of the Crucified One.” Immediately he “put into the hands of a trusted servant named Lupus all . . . he had inherited from his parents” and asked that it be distributed “to the poor and needy, saying, ‘Give away my earthly riches and let us seek the wealth of heaven’” (*Great Collection*, p. 384-5). He then prepared for death out of great love for the Life-giver.

How easy it is, instead, to put the Lord Jesus out of our mind and pursue the games and pleasures of this life, effectively revolting against our Savior in order “to follow after vain and worthless things” (vs. 5). We need not look far to see this kind of apostasy among secular-minded Christians who worship at the altars of success, indulgence, and self-esteem.

The Prophet Jeremiah records that the apostates of his day lacked historical memory. They never ask, “Where is the Lord, who led us out of the land of Egypt, who guided us in the wilderness, in an unknown and untrodden land, a land that was waterless and barren, in which no one traversed and where no son of man dwelt?” (vs. 6). They act as if the deliverance at the Red Sea and the covenant at Sinai never happened. Instead, they live only for the moment. Woe to us – and to every people who forget the need for the saving God – when we drift away from our sure moorings.

The blessed people of God are those who embrace King David’s words in their heart: “Make me to understand the way of Thy statutes, and I will ponder on Thy wondrous works” (Ps 118:27). God saved Israel from slavery in Egypt and, even more wondrously, He has saved us from the bitterness of sin and death. Life comes to us from “the Cross, the grave, the third-day Resurrection, the Ascension into heaven, the sitting at the right hand, and the second and glorious coming.” These are God’s doings, and we have the humble privilege of offering ourselves to Him in return for His love. “Thine own of Thine own we offer unto Thee” (Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom).

We find the surety for this life and for eternity in holding firm to God, cleaving to His Church, and confessing the Gospel. Jeremiah says, “Let my tongue cleave to my throat, if I remember thee not, if I set not Jerusalem above all other, as at the head of my joy” (Ps 136:7-8). If God is the “fountain of living water,” let us never make “broken cisterns, unable to hold water” (Jer 2:13).

*We who have put on Thee, O Christ our God, boweth also our heads unto Thee. Keep us ever as warriors invincible, even unto the end, through Thy crown incorruptible.* – Ablution Prayer, Sacrament of Chrismation

**October 26 – Wednesday – Wisdom of Solomon 3:1-9**  
**Third Reading at Vespers for the Great Martyr Demetrios**

**The Hand of God: *Wisdom of Solomon 3:1-9, especially vs. 1:*** “*But the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God. . . .*” As we read the calendar of saints, we note that some of Christ’s martyrs have the adjective “great” attached to their titles. What are the characteristics of martyrdom that it attracts such high praise from the Church?

During the sacrament of baptism, prayers are offered so that the servant of Christ may “preserve pure and unpolluted the garment of incorruption” in which he is clothed upon emerging from the cleansing waters. Each of the faithful must wage a daily cosmic struggle as an *invincible warrior* opposing the attacks of the corrupting powers. The Apostle Paul describes this warfare as a matter of standing “fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel” (Phil 1:27) - a glorious greatness!

The martyrs showed themselves “anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication . . . [they let their] requests be made known to God” (vs. 4:6). They meditated on “whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report” (vs. 8). Their example calls us to remain in God’s hand, to develop a strong spirit of peace in the face of pain and death, and to practice those well-disciplined actions by which God deems a servant “worthy of Himself” (Wis 3:5).

Solomon teaches that the righteous remain in the hand of God since “no torture will ever touch them” (vs. 1). Many of God’s saints were tortured and suffered great pain. An example from the last century was Father Arseny, a priest in the Soviet Union. A fellow prisoner in a Soviet labor camp says, “He was an exceptional man. He had been working like all the others for many years in the same camp. He was old and exhausted but he was still alive, he hadn’t died. He believed in something, he believed so hard that this was obviously the only reason he did not die, but lived. . . . We were in such a state that people fell down dead while still holding their spades and axes” (Bouteneff, *Father Arseny*, p. 164).

The martyrs were kept alive, unmoved by torment, because they possessed a true spiritual life: “He believed so hard that . . . he was still alive.” Yes, violence and pain touched their bodies as with every mortal, but *no torture* ever touched them (vs. 1). The verb “touch,” as used in the text, connotes conversing or communicating with pain. The infliction of pain sends us messages of hate, despair, and degradation; however, since “the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God” (vs. 1) and ever on guard to remain there, they reject pain’s messages and fend off torture’s impact.

Even in death, when the saints are seemingly destroyed, “they are at peace. For though in man’s view they were punished, their hope is full of immortality” (vss. 3-4). In Christ the true martyrs, the great martyrs, rejected death as the delusion of the godless – those whom Solomon calls “the undiscerning” (vs. 2). In facing death, “their hope is full of immortality” (vs. 4), for they permitted only Christ within their hearts. In pain and near death, their heart-conversation remained focused solely on the life-giving spirit of God.

Personal strength to endure pain before death must be established and sustained by prayer, fasting, and other ascetic practices that build up the virtues. Such asceticism, according to Saint Nikolai of Zicha, makes it sweeter to “walk with God without men than to walk with men without God” (*Prologue from Ochrid* vol. 4, p. 307). May God find us in that hour “like gold in a furnace” and accept us “as a whole burnt offering” (vs. 6).

*Thy martyrs, O Lord, possessed Thy strength in their courageous contest for Thee; by their prayers, grant us also Thine aid invincible, and save our souls, O merciful One.* – Dismissal Hymn of the Martyrs

## October 27 – Thursday – Kellia Reading – Joshua 5:13-15

**Before the Battle: Joshua 5:13-15, especially vs. 13:** “Then it came to pass, when Joshua was at Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing before him with a sword drawn in his hand.” The Prophet Joshua shows himself to be true warrior of the Lord, a shining type of those who fulfill the criteria that Saint Theophan the Recluse holds up: “In order to succeed . . . you must constantly oppose all evil in yourself and urge yourself towards the good. In other words, you must ceaselessly fight against yourself and against everything that panders to your own wills, that incites and supports them. So prepare yourself for this struggle and this warfare and know that the crown – attainment of your desired aim – is given to none except to the valiant among warriors and wrestlers” (*Unseen Warfare*, p. 80).

This passage portrays Joshua as the God-ordained commander of the army of God’s people. He is a man honored by his troops (Jos 1:16-18). Standing alone, he surveys the formidable battlements of Jericho, the first objective in what bodes to be a tough and protracted battle for possession of the Promised Land. Although he is Israel’s commanding officer, he has no siege towers, sappers for undermining the walls, or rams for battering down the bulwark before him. His spies find just one ally within the walls.

At this moment, trusting in God, he “looked up and saw” (vs. 5:13) a fortress well defended and ready to repel his forces. Observation is the first action required of each of us as warriors of the Lord: we must assess the foe facing us. Joshua reveals the five steps of this assessment: 1) searching the field with the eyes of the heart; 2) testing within oneself to determine if God is present; 3) worshiping the Lord who is the source of every victory; 4) seeking God’s plan; and 5) submitting to Him reverently. All of these actions are required before any battle in the spirit, if there is to be hope of a God-pleasing victory.

Joshua’s vision is emphasized by two separate verbs: he “looked up” and he “saw” – that is, he caught sight of something. What is meant by “looked up”? The eyes used by this prophet of Israel to look upward are not merely his physical eyes but also the eyes of the heart. Physically, he sees Jericho, but with the eyes of the heart Joshua perceives the deeper truths of the coming battle. Saint Isaac the Syrian notes that when a man’s knowledge is raised above the concerns of the world, he sees noetically – that is, with his heart – “what is hidden from the eyes. . . . Then faith . . . itself swallows up knowledge, converts it, and begets it anew. . . . Then it can *soar* in the realms of the bodiless. . . . Then the inner senses awaken for spiritual doing” (Vlachos, *Orthodox Psychotherapy*, p. 345-46). By lifting up and looking with one’s heart, one beholds what bodily vision cannot see.

Joshua sees before him an armed man, a warrior “with a sword drawn in his hand” (vs. 13). He advances. Is he facing friend or foe – someone sent from God, or one of his opponents? He asks, “Are you for us or on the side of our adversaries?” (vs. 13). We, as warriors of God, desperately need the assurance of God’s presence! And like the saints, Joshua receives a clear word from the Lord: “I am now come, the chief captain of the host of the Lord” (vs. 14). Naturally, “Joshua fell on his face upon the earth” (vs. 14), for this is what every true warrior does before the God of all when facing the enemy.

Finally, take note that the great warrior seeks to know the will of God: “O Master, what do you command your servant?” (vs. 14). He reverently submits to God, as does every disciple hoping for victory, and stands barefoot on the holy ground of God’s will (vs. 15).

*Almighty God, Thou knowest that I can do nothing without Thy guidance and help; assist me I pray Thee, and direct me to divine wisdom that whatever I do may be according to Thy will.* – Prayer Before Commencing Any Task

**October 28 = Friday – Kellia Reading – Joshua 6:1-7, 14-21**

**Devoted to God: Joshua 6:1-7, 14-21, especially vs. 16:** “For the city shall be accursed by the Lord, it and whatever is in it.” The obliteration of the Canaanite city of Jericho, which was delivered by the Lord to the army of Israel, brings to mind the utter devastation of many cities during World War II, such as the bombing of Warsaw, Dresden, Coventry, and various German industrial centers, and most especially the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Total war is nothing new. Centuries before the destruction of Jericho, the Lord declares the deliverance of “Jericho . . . its king and its army of soldiers who are mighty” (vs. 2), for as He explains to Abram, “the sin of the Amorites [was] not yet filled up” (Gn 15:16).

We understand the destruction of Jericho as the fulfillment of a curse against a people’s prolonged and unrepentant wickedness. For this reason the God who rules men’s affairs gave Jericho into the hand of Israel (Jos 6:2). The penalty meted out against the city and its people is indeed extreme, but God teaches us an invariable truth. The persistent, stubborn opponents of God may find themselves “accursed by the Lord” (vs. 16), receiving utter annihilation as their lot. Let us be attentive!

Our study of the sacred Law given through Moses reveals that God’s irrevocable judgment upon cumulative sin results in the destruction of any wicked person or community that has been consecrated to God. “Every devoted thing is most holy to the Lord. Furthermore, people devoted to the Lord shall not be redeemed, but shall surely be put to death” (Lv 27:28-29). The word “devoted” is a translation of *herem* in Hebrew or *anathema* in the Greek Septuagint. Once a person or thing is devoted to God it is forever consecrated to Him, and it remains under anathema or curse thereafter. Let us note, however, that “Rahab the harlot and whatever is in her house” (Jos 6:16) – including her family – is excluded from the general curse against Jericho.

This aspect of total surrender to God should be considered prayerfully by every Christian. When we give something of value to the Church we surrender all rights to that thing, whether it be placed in the offering tray, a tithe, or a special gift. There can be no thought of taking back what is given, although a parish may on occasion return some item when it is no longer useable. The donor who pledges a large amount of money has no more leverage on parish decisions than the donor of a smaller gift. What is given to the Lord is holy to Him, and it is thus *herem*, anathema. To expect something in return, or to exert control over what one gives, is a grievous sin. In giving to God everything is surrendered absolutely.

The present reading warns explicitly against any notion that Israel might acquire spoils of war in Jericho: “But be very careful to keep yourself from what is accursed, lest you yourself consider to take from it what is accursed, and then you shall make the camp of the children of Israel a curse and destroy us” (vs. 17). This is the same type of sin that can corrupt parish life.

In this connection, let us ponder for a moment how the Lord Jesus gives Himself over to death on the Cross. He is not constrained by any human agency to suffer the humiliation of crucifixion. Rather, in the mystery of salvation “ordained before the ages” (1 Cor 2:7), He willingly becomes an *accursed thing*, thus trampling down death by death and bestowing life upon us who, because of sin, were destined for eternal death. How awesome is self-offering of Christ our God for our sakes!

*Glory to Thee, O Lord, Who didst freely give Thyself unto death, and, having descended into hades by Thy Cross, hast made a way for all flesh through the Resurrection from the dead!* – Anaphora of the Divine Liturgy of Saint Basil

## October 29 – Saturday – Kellia Reading – Joshua 6:21-25

**Rahab Who Dwells in Israel: Joshua 6:21-25, especially vs. 24:** *“Thus Joshua kept alive Rahab the harlot and all the house of her father, and caused her to dwell in Israel to this very day. . . .”* Joshua unites Rahab to God’s people in response to her commitment to them. His act can be understood as a type of the reception of candidates at baptism. “Because she hid the spies” (vs. 24), the Prophet Joshua ensures that Rahab is safely removed from Jericho (vs. 21), taken “outside the camp of Israel” (vs. 22) and “kept alive” from the holocaust (vs. 24); he “caused her to dwell in Israel” (vs. 24). He does all this because she is found “worthy to flee unto [God’s] holy name, and to take refuge under the shelter of [His] wings” (from the baptismal service).

When she sides with Israel, Rahab asks the spies to swear to her “by the Lord God that as I showed you mercy, you shall also be merciful to me. . . . and deliver my soul from death” (vss. 2:12-13). She gains their warranty: “Our life for your life, even to death” (vs. 14). In the same way the Body of Christ seeks to “keep alive” those who flee to the power of the Lord, removing themselves “far from their former delusion,” committing their hearts to God through holy baptism, and embracing life among His people.

The two spies stand up for Rahab much as sponsors do in our baptismal mystery, for the men bring her out and “set her outside the camp of Israel” (vs. 6:22). Then Joshua, similar to our priests who care for new Christians, “cause[s] her to dwell in Israel” (vs. 24). Those of her own family who accompany her are also numbered among the people of God. “All [that] she possessed” (vs. 22) comes with her, like those things of Jericho that have enduring value: “The silver, the gold, the bronze, and the iron they brought into the treasury of the Lord” (vs. 23). Everything else “was set on fire” (vs. 23). We likewise build our life in Christ on the “foundation with gold, silver, precious stones” instead of wood, hay, and straw, that we may endure the Day of Judgment and the fire that will “test each one’s work, of what sort it is” (1 Cor. 3:12,13).

To enter the Church is to leave every Jericho behind, consigning it to spiritual fire and burning it to ashes within our hearts. This is what it means to renounce “Satan . . . and all his works, and all his service, and all his pride” (service of baptism). The city of Jericho was given as holocaust or whole burnt offering to the Lord. The word itself comes from the Greek *kaustos*, meaning “burnt,” while the prefix *holo* indicates “wholly” or “totally.” A holocaust is totally consumed by fire or sword – in other words, totally obliterated. The term has aptly been applied to what took place in Ukraine between 1930 and 1933, when ten million people starved to death or were murdered during forced collectivized farming, or when Dresden was fire-bombed in World War II. In a positive light, it can be applied to the heart of a person who wholly embraces the Lord.

The one exception to the holocaust at Jericho seems to have been Rahab. The former harlot of Jericho died to her former persona of prostitute and citizen of that doomed city. Truly, she totally sacrificed herself by assisting the spies and severed every bond with her former people and community. Because she wholly offered herself and her family to Israel, she not only became a lifelong member “in Israel to this very day” (Jos 6:24), but received the blessing to become the ancestor of our Lord Jesus Christ. Following the campaign at Jericho, she married Salmon and bore him a son, Boaz, who subsequently took Ruth the Moabite as his wife. Thus Rahab became a direct ancestor of David the King (Mt 1:5), through whom she is a righteous foremother of Christ our God.

*O Lord Jesus Christ, our King and God, by Thy mercy may each of us preserve our baptismal garment and the earnest of the Spirit undefiled unto Thy dread Day of Judgment.* – Chrismation Prayer of Ablution

## October 30 – Sunday – Kellia Reading – Joshua 7:1-9

**Duplicity: Joshua 7:1-9, especially vs. 1:** “*But the children of Israel committed a great offense, for they kept back for themselves something from what was accursed. Achan the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took something from what was accursed, and the Lord was very angry with the sons of Israel.*” We learned from the previous reading that the entire Amorite city of Jericho is accursed, designated as a holocaust offering to God. When people of God see the city walls collapse, they know it is not a result of any human efforts involving battering rams, scaling, or undermining.

The people’s sole contribution is to march obediently around the city in solemn procession as directed by God and, finally, to shout at Joshua’s command. They offer up the enemy fortress with all its people and possessions as a victory from God. To the eyes of the world, and especially to those inside Jericho, those seven days of processions must have seemed like a surreal drama. Yet Jericho did fall, for it was “accursed by the Lord, it and whatever [was] in it” (Jos 6:16).

God’s people understand that Jericho is cursed to be a holocaust offering to the Lord, including everyone – except Rahab and her family – and everything in it but for the precious metals. However, one man disobeys these explicit orders and takes an accursed thing, which is a direct breach of trust between the Lord God and his fellow Israelites (vs. 7:1). The consequences for all are dire.

The Book of Joshua’s account of the events at Ai reveals how one person’s duplicity, covetousness, and disobedience can wound an entire army, so that the men now run frightened during a minor skirmish and thirty-six fall dead. Despite what they saw the Lord do with the great city of Jericho, they flee before the militia of the smaller city of Ai.

What does Achan’s duplicity teach us concerning the breaking God’s commandments – about the breach of the trust and sacred vows of our shared life among the faithful? Is behavior a mere matter of individual choice? Does disregard of a pledge before God and His people affect only the person who breaks the rules? Clearly not! The teaching of the Prophet Joshua is that one person’s sin, whether overt or covert, wounds the entire body of the faithful. For Christians, it means adding new wounds to Christ our God! This is the mind of the Church and the truth of the Lord.

The cost of private sin always is written on the great canvas of God, with the results affecting the welfare of the entire Church (1 Cor 12:26). We should always pray: “O Lord, keep me from disobedience, that I never wound Thy people! And when I fall into sin, lead me to flee at once to our pastors, confess my wrong to Thee, seek Thy forgiveness and mercy, and make restitution, as and when appropriate. Accept my confessions; correct me; stop every dread outcome of my wickedness upon my brethren within the Body of Christ; help me always to remember the sin of Achan and the terrible consequences of any hidden offense!”

God reveals to us how we ought to respond when disaster befalls the people of God: “Joshua tore his clothes and fell to the ground . . . both he and the elders of Israel, and they put dust on their heads” (Jos 7:6). Bad things do happen to God’s people, and yet we note what the holy community of Israel does under Joshua’s leadership: they worship and seek consolation and direction from the Lord. The prophet pours out his inmost concerns. Has he acted precipitously in crossing the Jordan? Has he failed to listen attentively to God? (vs. 7). He frankly speaks his worst fears (vs. 9). When others sin, when we ourselves offend, let us turn to the Lord in grief and fear, seeking right direction from Him.

*We commend ourselves and each other unto Thee, O Master who lovest mankind; grant us forgiveness of sins, unto pardon of transgressions, and communion of the Holy Spirit.* – Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom

## October 31 – Monday – Kellia Reading – Joshua 7:10-26

**Removing Sin: Joshua 7:10-26, especially vs. 13:** “*You shall not be able to stand against your enemies until you remove the accursed thing from among you.*” Saint John Cassian asserts, “When we confess with our own mouths that the God and Lord of the Universe is our Father, we claim that we have been called from our condition as slaves to adoption as children” (Beasley-Topliffe, *Making a Life of Prayer*, p. 50). God’s call truly frees the heart and soul, as reflected in this prayer from the mystery of chrismation: “Thou . . . hast given unto Thy servants remission of sins, and has bestowed upon us a life of regeneration.” Indeed, the grace of God enables us to gain victory over our enemies: “Thou hast not forsaken them that seek Thee, O Lord” (Ps 9:10).

However, our for the things of this world inevitably interferes with our life in Christ. According to Saint John Cassian, there is always a danger of “lingering in this present life,” which can prevent our escape from slavery to sin. If we dawdle like children to play with toys, we distance ourselves from our loving Father. Saint John urges against such neglect: “May we not allow anything of this kind, which would make us unworthy of our profession and the dignity of an adoption of this kind, to deprive us as a disgrace to our Father’s inheritance and so make us incur the wrath of God’s justice and severity” (Beasley-Topliffe, p. 50-51).

The Prophet Joshua instructs us to take up the stones of the Promised Land and kill the Achan in our hearts – the “old man” who keeps us enslaved and holds back our *new man* (Eph 4:24). The inner Achan hides and must be ferreted out, for his presence makes us constantly vulnerable and “not able to stand against [our] enemies” (Jos 7:12). God’s grace shows us that we are *accursed* by that dark presence; He “will not be with [us] until [we] remove the accursed thing” (vs. 12).

Cassian teaches us to focus our energies not on profiting ourselves, but rather on promoting our Father’s glory by saying, “Hallowed be Thy name.” The story of Achan is meant to awaken our hearts so that we may identify our inner Achan and stone him!

Today the Lord is calling us; it is time to “rise up and sanctify” ourselves (vs. 13) and so put an end to whatever makes us fail, disobey, or founder. Let us examine our souls and identify every attachment, loyalty, and personal preference that impedes our membership in the royal priesthood of God’s people (1 Pt 2:9). We are sealed with the Holy Spirit – let us seek His illumination. He will disclose the hidden man “which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts” (Eph. 4:22) and fills us with shame and fear. May we proceed to expose him and confront him face to face!

Through self-examination, aided by the Holy Spirit, the old Achan can be *pointed out* (Jos 7:18). Then, with a prophetic voice as if from God Himself, let us say, “Give glory to the Lord God of Israel today and make confession. Tell me what you did and hide nothing” (vs. 19). We are to say without hesitation to Christ our Savior, “Truly, I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel. Thus and thus I did” (vs. 20). Achan of old admits his surrender to covetousness (vs. 21) – can we afford to do less? Let us hasten to our confessor and bare our souls to Him. Unlike Achan, we have a savior in the God-Man who understands the allure of the temptations we face (Heb 4:15). He grants “mercy and . . . grace to help in time of need” (Heb 4:16).

Let us allow our Joshua, our Jesus, to lead us up into the Valley of Achor and, stone by stone, to kill everything associated with the Achan within. Every hidden sin in our souls chains us to futility. Let us find and destroy every vestige that we may live with Christ (Rom 6:4-8).

*Keep us ever as warriors invincible; and make us all victors, even unto the end, through Thy crown incorruptible. For Thine it is to show mercy and to save us, O Lord.* – Chrismation Prayer