

**November 1 – Wednesday of the Twenty-fourth Week after Pentecost**  
**Luke 11:42-46**

**True and False Religion – Love: Luke 11:42-46, especially vs. 42:** “*But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass by justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.*” Christ’s comment, in this verse, arises directly from the well-known commandment to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Lv 19:18). Our Lord contrasts false religion and true faith by noting that false piety avoids justice and, most especially, the love of God for others. This means extending God’s love to other people in a fair, loving, and kind manner.

Any religious faith that does not require a person to love others is a false religion. According to the Apostle John, “If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar” (1 Jn 4:20). On this basis the Lord Jesus asserts that the Pharisees’ piety is false. It lacks the *love of God* by failing to love others. The Lord prophesies great woe for them because they neither care for nor provide justice for other people. Refusing to love brings afflictions upon us.

Christ excoriates the Pharisees and their followers because, rather than loving others, they “love the best seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces” (Lk 11:43). These men enjoy receiving social recognition and garnering the adoration of others. But Christ warns, “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Mt 6:21). If we invest our time and energy in obtaining recognition from others, the results will be spiritually dangerous.

The Church Fathers knew the dangers of seeking recognition and approval. Consider Saint Sava of Russia, who lived a strict ascetic life in the Monastery of the Theotokos in Pskov. Being greatly admired for his labors, he was elected abbot. He chose, however, to flee from the glory of men, withdrawing to an island in Lake Krypetsk in Serbia and founding a new community.

Commenting on Saint Sava’s flight, Saint Nikolai of Zicha observes that “the praise of men steals our hearts” (*Prologue From Ochrid* vol. 3, p. 250). Desire for adulation is always a sinister passion! “When our praisers, or rather our seducers, begin to praise us,” advises Saint John Climacus, “let us briefly call to mind the multitude of our sins, and we shall find ourselves unworthy of what is said or done” (*Ladder of Divine Ascent* 22.42, p. 137).

In the present passage, we note that our Lord warns the Pharisees that false piety makes them like unmarked graves (Lk 11:44). The Law of Moses teaches God’s people to avoid dead things, alerting us to the impurity and defilement of death. The Pharisees interpreted this to mean that stepping on a grave defiled a person, which then required a ritual bath of purification and other acts of piety (Lv 22:4-7).

Such formalistic piety can easily become devoid of the Spirit of God, no matter how many acts of overt devotion we perform. Tangible piety can enslave us to mere forms, like avoiding unmarked graves. To trust in pious acts more than in God’s love, or in our responsibility to care for others, is a form of death. May we ever be guided by our life-giving Savior so that piety never dominate our souls. Instead, let our devotional acts awaken us to God and His genuine love.

Outward piety – acts done out of habit or conformity – loads “men with burdens hard to bear” (Lk 11:46). Slavish attention to our behavior separates us from the stirrings of the Holy Spirit. Our pious actions must be connected to God’s self-giving love, and above all to sharing His love with others in true joy, thankfulness, and delight.

If we remain attentive to what drives our actions, we will notice the true aim of our hearts. Let us ask ourselves, “How is my heart leading me? Do my actions awaken my heart to Christ, and to compassion for others as well?”

*O Lord, fill my heart with true reverence, joy, and love always, now and forever.* – Priestly prayer, Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom

**November 2 – Thursday of the Twenty-fourth Week after Pentecost**  
**Luke 11:47-12:1**

**True and False Religion – Using Knowledge: Luke 11:47-12:1, especially vs. 52:** *“Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge. You did not enter in yourselves, and those who were entering in you hindered.”* The Lord Jesus now pronounces woe against the lawyers. These skilled opinion-setters blocked the way to a genuine relationship with God by their use of lofty terminology and their attacks on those who taught simply and directly. The Lord’s censure of the lawyers parallels the Church’s concern for accessible belief and practice.

The Lord Jesus’ condemnation of the lawyers is scathing. He declares that God will judge the lawyers for shedding the blood of the prophets “from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah who perished between the altar and the temple” (vs. 51; 2 Chr 24:17-21). Why does our Lord affix blame to a few first-century teachers for all the wrongs done to God’s prophets throughout history? In what way is His pronouncement fair?

Consider Christ’s reasoning. If those who make shrines at the tombs of the prophets and saints continue the practices of those who murdered the holy ones, they are as guilty of silencing God’s chosen spokesmen as any murderer. Furthermore, the first-century experts whom the Lord condemns will soon conspire to impose the death sentence on Jesus Himself (Lk 11:54). This conspiracy results in the Lord’s crucifixion. However, their actions prove that it is impossible to silence Truth (Jn 1:14). They deserve condemnation.

Our Savior especially criticizes the lawyers for monopolizing knowledge of God. In first century Palestine, the populace spoke Aramaic. Yet when Scripture was read in the synagogues Hebrew was used. In this way the learned scribes, by virtue of their elite status and training, became the authoritative interpreters of the Scriptures. They “explained” its teachings, with the majority depending on them to interpret the holy covenant with God in a language they could readily understand.

The Orthodox Church has always been concerned with conveying Christ’s teachings in an accessible way. From the beginning, Orthodox Christians have translated the key works of apostolic tradition – the Scriptures, liturgy, and writing of the Fathers – into the vernacular languages of the world’s peoples.

In this way we ensure that everyone can find the truth, grow in faith, and cultivate a true, living relationship with God. Furthermore, when deceptive leaders such as Arius or the iconoclasts sought to force a false theology on the Church, God’s people are able to resist such assaults and uphold a correct application of Orthodox faith and practice.

The scribes, by claiming “hidden” insights, complicated the plain meaning of the texts of Scripture for their own purposes. They did not enter personally into the meaning of the written word, and effectively hindered other people from doing so (Lk 11:52). This is why Orthodoxy strives to make available the fullness of the faith, simply and directly.

Finally, the Lord’s opponents “assail Him vehemently,” cross-examining Jesus at every point, “seeking to catch Him in something . . . that they might accuse Him” (vss. 53-54). However, by His actions and words, Jesus presents God’s Truth openly to all and for all. The Church likewise strives to show everyone the way to Lord at all times, in all places, and under all circumstances. Let us always labor to share the faith simply and clearly.

*We sing Thy praises, O Christ: Grant us forgiveness of what we have done in benighted delusion; come provide a path that we may ascend upon it and find glory in Thee.* – Canon of the Nativity

**November 3 – Friday of the Twenty-fourth Week after Pentecost**  
**Luke 12:2-12**

**True and False Religion – Confession: Luke 12:2-12, especially vss. 8-9:** “Whoever confesses Me before men, him the Son of Man also will confess before the angels of God. But he who denies Me before men will be denied before the angels of God.” The Lord reveals that each true “member and partaker of the death and resurrection of Christ” witnesses to Him, while those of false religion deny Him. Saint Cyril of Jerusalem urges us to examine the difference between confessing and denying Christ: “It is . . . a thing above all others worthy of our attention to see who it is that confesses Christ, and in what way one may rightly and blamelessly confess Him” (“Homily 88,” *Commentary on the Gospel of Saint Luke*, p. 355).

During the Divine Liturgy we confess Christ in the words of the Nicene Creed: “I believe in . . . one Lord Jesus Christ.” Many great truths and dogmas of the Church concerning the Lord Jesus Christ are imbedded in our symbol of faith – indeed, more truths than we could explore in the course of many meditations. But the bottom line is that we do confess the Lord Jesus by our declarations in the Creed, at least verbally.

Do we fully understand these creedal professions concerning Christ our God? For example, what does it mean that He is “Light of Light, Very God of Very God”? Or that He is “begotten, not made,” meaning that there is no moment when He has not been? Or that He was “incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary,” “rose again on the third day,” and “sitteth at the right hand of the Father”? How do we comprehend the fact that we will stand before His dread judgment seat when “He shall come again in glory”?

These phrases are not like cars of a freight train that we can detach and then shunt aside. Each statement is intrinsic to the Lord Jesus’ identity – innate, natural, true, and essential to His Person – and requires us to embrace and live by these truths concerning Christ.

If we try to get around any of them, we deny Him – according to Saint Cyril, “in like manner [as] both the followers and the teachers of heresy deny Him” (p. 357). No matter what positive statements others may make concerning Jesus, those outside of the Orthodox confession deny Him, including Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, secularists, humanists, and Latter Day Saints.

Down the centuries many have been asked to deny Christ under threat of sword, gun, ax, and spear. The Emperor Aurelian urged the fifteen-year-old Saint Mamas to “deny Christ only with [your] lips.” The youth replied: “I shall not deny my God and King, Jesus Christ, either in my heart or with my lips” (*Prologue From Ochrid* vol. 3, p. 279). Mamas was killed for this true confession from his heart. As Saint Paul says, “For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation” (Rom 10:10).

Not every Christian is pressed to deny Christ under threat of death, yet many have chosen to live in physical, emotional, and social agony rather than deny Him. Saint Maximos says, “I prefer to die rather than to have on my conscience that I in any way at all have been deficient in what concerns faith in God” (Berthold, *Maximos the Confessor*, p. 23). He was horribly mutilated and then exiled for his stand on behalf of his faith. Let us study and imitate his witness!

Many unassuming Christians choose to endure inconvenience, embarrassed silence, mockery, and lost friendships for the sake of their faith. These simple confessions involve neither drama nor heroism. Let us make our prayer, worship, and our every activity a confession. If we work keep our hearts joined to the Lord, we may fight off our wavering and wandering and seek God’s grace for a true profession of saving faith. Let us confess Christ our God with one heart and one mouth.

*I believe, O Lord, and I confess that Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God; save me and deliver me.*

**November 4 – Saturday of the Twenty-fourth Week after Pentecost**  
**Luke 9:1-6**

**Led by the Spirit: Luke 9:1-6, especially vs. 1:** “Then He called His twelve disciples together and gave them power and authority. . . .” These verses describe the occasion when the Lord Jesus first sends out the Twelve “to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick” (vs. 2). Even as Christ dispatches the disciples, His principal concern is for their spiritual formation. He desires them to develop into worthy, productive apostles and profitable servants, responsive to the guidance of God.

The development of the disciples into “servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God” (1 Cor 4:1) requires the disciples to be open to direction from the Holy Spirit. Nothing of eternal value will be accomplished for our salvation if we are not responsive to the Spirit in our life and ministry. Christ commands the first disciples, and those gathered around them, to “wait for the Promise of the Father” (Acts 1:4).

Saint Luke sets forth three essentials for us if we are respond to the promised Holy Spirit. First, we are to “take nothing for the journey” (Lk 9:3) but rely only on what God provides. Second, we are to stay in “whatever house [we] enter” (vs. 4), accepting what the Holy Spirit offers us. Third, we are to “shake off the very dust from [our] feet as a testimony” (vs. 5) when we are not welcomed as Christ’s servants. We mature spiritually when we learn to trust the Holy Spirit and share our experience with others as our fellow apprentices.

According to Saint Ambrose of Milan, “Since captive breasts certainly [can] not receive [the Holy Spirit], the Lord Jesus first led captivity captive, that our affections being set free, [and] He might pour forth the gift of divine grace” in us through the Holy Spirit (“On the Holy Spirit” 1.66, *NPNF* Second Series, vol. 10, p. 102). When we become captivated by material needs in this present life, we lose our freedom to receive the limitless help of the Holy Spirit. By stripping us of our dependence on material things before we can work with others, the Lord encourages us to rely on the Spirit’s provision (vs. 3).

Above all, the Lord Jesus desires to free us for the infilling of the Holy Spirit, by increasing our faith in the Spirit’s presence. After all, the Holy Spirit works with the faithful so that we may receive whatever we require for ministry. God uses material things and limitations to guide, free, and enable the Church to carry out His work. When a door is opened by the Spirit (Acts 14:27), it signals the need to focus our efforts in a God-pleasing manner, as the Spirit indicates.

When the first disciples begin their ministry, they received hospitality from some people while others reject them (Lk 9:4, 5). Today, the Holy Spirit draws some into the Church but is rejected by others. When we meet with positive responses to the Gospel message, we understand where the Spirit is actively healing and where the focus of the Church needs to be. We are to “stay there, and from there depart” (vs. 4). May we become sensitive to presence of the Holy Spirit who guides us according to the infinite wisdom of the Lord (Acts 16:6-10)!

We who constitute the Church do not expect to meet success everywhere. Our primary task is to be obedient and faithful. Certainly, when we fail to rely on the Spirit we are crippled by disappointment. Let us allow the Holy Spirit to tell us when to “shake off the dust” (Lk 9:5) and when we are to speak and heal. If we mature in this way, there will be no crippling disappointments in our ministry, nor in those with whom we share the Gospel of Christ.

*O Lord, send Thy Spirit upon Thy Church, that we may offer Thee a rich harvest of souls, ready to please Thee in word and deed and to be guided by Thy life-giving Holy Spirit.*

**November 5 – Twenty-fourth Sunday after Pentecost**  
**Luke 8:41-56**

**The Gift of Faith: Luke 8:41-56, especially vs. 48:** “*And He said to her, ‘Daughter, be of good cheer; your faith has made you well. Go in peace.’*” In this passage we find two accounts of divine healing, one involving a woman and the other a child. These accounts invite us to reflect on how faith relates to healing. Take note especially of the words of Jesus, who says, “Faith has made you well.” A little later, He says to Jairus, “Do not be afraid; only believe, and she will be made well” (vs. 50).

Let us begin with Jesus’ second directive, involving the cure of the child. It contains two commands: first, to “not be afraid,” and second, to “believe” (vs. 50). The Lord then sets forth an outcome, a future condition: “She will be made well.” This last remark, in contrast to the commands, is in passive form. This grammatical construction omits reference to the agent of the verb, conveying only the idea that “she will be made well” by something, or someone, unspecified.

Now let us turn to the remark our Lord addresses to the woman who comes in search of healing. Here he declares active accomplishment: “Your faith has made you well” (vs. 48). The agent of healing – faith – is the subject in this instance.

What conclusion may be drawn from a comparison of the two statements? Both imply that faith plays an effective role in healing. It would be perfectly acceptable – both grammatically and theologically – for the Lord to say to the father of the child, “She will be made well by your faith.” This meaning is certainly implied when the Lord commands the father to “*only believe!*”

Regardless of the strength or weakness of our faith, we know God to be the source of life and healing. The evangelist could have said, “She will be made well by God.” Is it by faith, then, or by the Lord that our healing comes? The passage teaches that both are necessary. Let us examine the facts.

First, we see that Christ is the One who heals in both instances. Yes, the woman is healed because she reaches out in faith to touch the hem of His garment, even before power (*dynamis*) goes forth from the Lord (vs. 46). She must have faith in order to touch Him. Still, the narrative makes clear that both her faith and the action of the Son of God are required.

In the second example, we find the same two elements present. In the case of Jairus, we can safely assume that no ruler of a synagogue is likely to fall down at someone’s feet unless he believes that this person can truly help him. Jairus has faith.

Moreover, the Lord Jesus’ commands to Him are obviously intended to counter any loss of faith on the ruler’s part. When the news comes that his daughter is dead, loss of faith seems a likely outcome. As if that is not enough of a blow, Jairus must now walk home past a group of mourners who know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that the girl is dead.

The Lord’s double command aims to keep the father’s faith intact (vs. 50). But Christ our God must still issue His command of healing: “Little girl, arise” (vs. 54). Both human faith and divine action are required for healing. No amount of human faith alone will reverse death when it is permitted by God. On the other hand, faith may join with God’s will to extend life and grant healing (see 2 Kgs 20:1-5, 4 Kgs 20:1-5).

God knows our needs and encourages us to seek Him for healing. We may expect great things from our God when we place our faith in Him, for He is both life-giving and merciful.

*O Master, Lord our God, Physician of souls and bodies, Who dost cure temporal sufferings and healest every infirmity and every wound of men; save us and bring us to true faith.*

– Mystery of Holy Unction

**November 6 – Monday of the Twenty-fifth Week after Pentecost**  
**Luke 12:13-15, 22-31**

**The Goal of Life: Luke 12:13-15, 22-31, especially vs. 15, 31:** “*And [Jesus] said to them, ‘Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses. . . . But seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you.’*” According to Nicolas Zernov, the nineteenth-century Orthodox writers Khomiakov, Dostoevsky, and Soloviev “knew man infinitely better than most of their contemporaries and many of the leaders of today. They were able to penetrate those dark corners of the human soul which have a decisive influence, especially in times of anxiety and crisis. This deep understanding of man enabled these prophetic writers to predict the course of events with surprising accuracy” (*Three Russian Prophets*, p. 152).

Being Orthodox, these writers derived their knowledge of human nature readily and naturally. The Lord Jesus recognizes mankind’s need for the vitality of Orthodox faith. As He responds to a frustrated man caught in an inheritance squabble (vs. 13), He also speaks to our benighted race, exposing our illusions that life is merely a chase after this world’s goods (vs. 15).

At the same time, Christ directs all of us to seek the highest good. If life is not a matter of abundant possessions, as the consumer mentality would have us believe, then what is our true goal? What is worth having? What endures eternally? Without denying that we have needs in this world, the Lord Jesus sets before us the single, primary goal that gives life genuine meaning vitality: the kingdom of God (vs. 31).

In the Parable of the Treasure in the Field (Mt 13:44), Christ explains in a single verse what seeking the kingdom of God entails. He shows us the need for a total investment of ourselves, for we are to sell everything in order to buy the field with its heavenly treasure.

If we redirect our life toward the kingdom, we obtain freedom from the fear of poverty (Lk 12:22-23). The Prophet David affirms this perspective. By embracing the kingdom, we find that “the Lord is my Shepherd, and I shall not want” (Ps 22:1). When we place ourselves under His guidance, He causes us to dwell in green pasture and nurtures us “beside the water of rest” (vs. 2). Our conversion enables the Lord to lead us “on the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake” (vs. 3). Even “in the midst of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me” (vs. 4).

Truth emerges when we seek the kingdom of God. “Hear these things, as many as are poor or rather, as many as desire to be rich,” says Saint John Chrysostom. “It is not poverty that is the thing to be feared, but not being willing to be poor. Account poverty to be nothing to fear, and it will not be a matter for fear to you. This fear is not in the nature of the thing, but in the judgment of feeble-minded men” (“Homily 90 on Saint Matthew,” *NPNF First Series*, vol. 10, p. 152).

If we go about our business in this life seeking the kingdom as our primary goal, as we would seek a treasure buried in a field we purchased, the Lord promises us that all will be well. “Do not seek what you should eat or what you should drink, nor have an anxious mind. For all these things the nations of the world seek after, and your Father knows that you need these things” (Lk 12:29).

What then? “Seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you” (vs. 31). Do we want to be slaves to our stomachs, our checkbooks, our social status? Would we not rather have the freedom that Christ gives? “Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed” (Jn 8:36).

*Grant to us, O Lord, the peace of our spiritual powers, faith unashamed, love unfeigned, the increase of wisdom, the fulfillment of Thy commandments, and the attainment of Thy kingdom. . . .* –  
Post-communion Prayer

**November 7 – Tuesday of the Twenty-fifth Week after Pentecost**  
**Luke 12:42-48**

**On Earth as in Heaven: Luke 12:42-48, especially vs. 43:** “Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes.” This passage begins a series of readings from Saint Luke’s Gospel concerning those matters addressed in the Lord’s Prayer: doing God’s will, forgiving and being forgiven, and coping with evil. The Lord begins with the meaning of the petition, “Your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven” (vs. 11:2).

When we ask the Lord for His will to be done on earth, in us and through us, He will help us to keep His commandments. He will shower grace on us should we humbly and faithfully accept the sufferings required if we are to follow His orders.

Our Lord describes the servant who does His will as a “faithful and wise steward” (vs. 12:42). “Such men are few and far between,” warns Blessed Theophylact. “If the steward of the master’s holding is faithful, but lacks wisdom, the property is ruined because he is not able to administer it as he should. . . . On the other hand, if the steward is a wise and able administrator, but is not faithful, he is no better than a thief, and the cleverer he is, the more disastrous the results” (*Commentary on the Holy Gospel According to Saint Luke*, p. 156).

Herein lies the key to diligently keeping the commandments: our efforts must be coupled with utter reliance on the wisdom and grace of God. “All the saints, as friends of God, make use of what belongs to God, their Friend,” Theophylact concludes.

The steward of God actively practices virtue and lives quietly and devoutly as God instructs him through holy tradition. By following these basic guidelines, the “friend of God” becomes a servant who controls the passions of anger and self-indulgence. Such a person draws strength from God, especially from the sacrament of holy communion, and has a genuine desire to make God-pleasing decisions at work, at home, and with everyone he meets.

“Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” is our pledge to commit ourselves to God’s wisdom. It is a promise to follow His ways and a willingness to manage whatever He places in our care. If we do these things, Christ may find us worthy of greater gifts and responsibilities (vs. 44).

The Lord Jesus contrasts the wise and faithful steward with the servant who does not make a truly wise commitment from his heart. The unfaithful servant may say “Your will be done,” but then, in his role as a steward, he “says in his heart, ‘My master is delaying his coming,’ and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and be drunk” (vs. 45). He indulges his passions, lashing out at his fellow Christians. He lives willfully and irreverently, giving free rein to his desires.

Using this example of an indulgent servant, Christ encourages us to control our desires. Saint Paul tells us that if we “walk in the Spirit . . . you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh” (Gal 5:16). We must prepare “for labor, sweat and struggle from your very first steps on the path. You must sacrifice everything to God and do only His will. Yet you will meet in yourself as many wills as you have powers and wants, which all clamor for satisfaction, irrespective of whether it is in accordance with the will of God or not. Therefore . . . it is necessary to stifle your own wills and finally . . . kill them altogether” (Saint Nikodemos, *Unseen Warfare*, p. 80-81).

To say “Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” is a form of commitment to Jesus Christ. We agree to take up a struggle, maintain it for life, and quickly return to the Lord in repentance whenever we fail. Let us prepare for the coming of our Savior and make every effort to do our Master’s will so that we may be blessed and not “beaten with many stripes” (vs. 47).

*O Lord and Master of my life, take from me the spirit of sloth, meddling, lust of power, and idle talk; but give rather the spirit of chastity, humility, patience and love to Thy servant.* – Saint Ephraim the Syrian

**November 8 – Wednesday of the Twenty-fifth Week after Pentecost  
Luke 12:48-59**

**Forgive Us as We Forgive Others: Luke 12:48-59, especially vs. 49, 51:** “I came to send fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! . . . Do you suppose that I came to give peace on earth? I tell you, not at all, but rather division.” What is the nature of the fire of which Christ speaks? How do we understand these violent images? Is His true purpose to disrupt and divide, rather than to bring peace? (Jn 16:33). Does He contradict Himself?

The Lord Jesus Christ is quite willing to divide humanity. He is forthright concerning His intentions: “Do you suppose that I came to give peace on earth? I tell you, not at all, but rather division” (Lk 12:51). The God-man came as the Word of fire which “consumes every materialistic and coarse thought and destroys idols made of whatever substance” (Blessed Theophylact, *Explanation of the Holy Gospel According to Saint Luke*, p. 161). Christ is the fire of truth igniting the imbedded lies of this world.

Not long after the Lord expresses His longing to ignite this fire, Satan launches his final assault to eliminate the God-man through the ultimate baptism of the Cross (vs. 50). Covert conflict becomes open war. From that day onward, the human race has lived in a state of total spiritual war. No one is neutral; there is no “civilian population” removed from the conflict. In the end, each person on earth supports one side or the other.

This spiritual war is not a conflict created by God, but the product of Satan and those who join him in fighting against God. “We say therefore, that not every peace is good and beyond reproach,” continues the Blessed Theophylact, “[for] there is a peace which is dangerous and drives us away from the love of God, for example, when we make peace and establish harmony by destroying. . . . Indeed, concerning what is true and good, He wants us to be at odds with each other rather than appease one another by compromise of the good.”

Adversarial conflict is our present reality (vss. 58-59). Families are torn apart and fragmented by hate (vss. 52-53). Every disciple needs to be aware of the conditions that set “father . . . against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother” (vs. 53). Very often the conflict seems to come not from unseen, demonic foes, but from those near and dear to us. People we rely upon fail us, and we betray our friends. Yes, people wrong us, and we in turn wrong others. This is the present spiritual war.

In the no-man’s land where we are often caught up in a spiritual cross-fire between hate and wrong, we survive by speaking the truth, by loving and forgiving. The Lord teaches us how to stay alive in a war zone: “When you pray, say . . . forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us” (vss. 11:2, 4).

When we pray these words, we acknowledge two truths: first, our need for forgiveness, and second, our desperate need to forgive others. We admit to God what the Prophet David confesses to the Lord: “Against Thee only have I sinned and done this evil before Thee” (Ps 50:4). “If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us,” Saint John reminds us (1 Jn 1:10).

For our eternal survival, we need to meet the Lord’s standard. If we “forgive men their trespasses, [so] your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Mt 6:14-15). Let us “make every effort along the way to settle” our debts with God and our adversaries (Lk 12:58). This action is more than mere religious talk or an empty gesture – it is a choice with urgent and eternal consequences.

*Grant us, O Lord, pardon and remission of our sins and transgressions and Thy good and profitable, life-bestowing grace to forgive those who offend and wrong us.* – Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom



**November 9 - Thursday of the Twenty-fifth Week after Pentecost**  
**Luke 13:1-9**

**Deliver Us From Evil: Luke 13:1-9, especially vss. 3, 5:** *“I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.”* Christ our God is discussing the news events of the day, after some who have come to hear Him report that some residents of Galilee were killed for provoking the Roman occupation forces (vs. 1). They are wondering whether these deaths are actually a punishment from God (vs. 2), a speculation that our Lord flatly rejects (vs. 3). In His answer, the Lord also mentions those who died accidentally when the tower of Siloam collapsed. They were in the wrong place at the wrong time (vs. 4), and thus were not being punished by God.

The Lord Jesus uses these two events to admonish his listeners, then and now, to remember the brevity of human life. The business of every man should thus be repentance (vs. 5). To this admonition He adds a parable further emphasizing our need to turn to God constantly for mercy (vss. 6-9).

His teaching unfolds in several steps. First, He acknowledges the evil in the world. He reminds us that evil, without warning, can bring sudden death. Then He notes that death also occurs as a result of social conditions and by mishap. Finally, the Lord prompts us to “complete the remaining time of our life in peace and repentance,” as we pray during the Divine Liturgy, in recognition of the uncertainty of human life.

Note how the Lord Jesus discourages speculative theology – the effort to discern the outcome of events, the hour of one’s death, or other matters which God has not revealed. Such inquiries are the pastime of fools. The prophets and Church Fathers stand by this point.

The Prophet Job reaches a dead end in speculation, and realizes the uselessness of conjecture: “For who is he that hides counsel from You? Who keeps back his words and thinks to hide them from You? Who will tell me what I knew not, things too great and wonderful, which I did not know? . . . I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You” (Job 42:3, 5). Job is converted when God reveals Himself.

The presumption that we can ferret out God’s thoughts is blasphemous. “‘For My counsels are not as your counsels, neither are your ways My ways,’ says the Lord. ‘But as the heaven is distant from the earth, so is My way distant from your ways, and your thoughts from My mind’” (Is 55:8-9).

As Job confesses, as God shows to Isaiah, and as the Lord Jesus teaches, all speculation is futile. “Let the ungodly man abandon his ways, and the lawless man his counsels; and let him return to the Lord, and he will have mercy on him; for He shall forgive your sins abundantly” (Is 55:7). Saint Gregory the Theologian says succinctly, “The divine nature cannot be apprehended by human reason” (“Second Theological Oration,” *NPNF Second Series*, vol. 7, p. 293).

The Christian Faith is not philosophy, but rather communion with God. There is much of the mind of God that has been disclosed to us: faith, hope, and love, right and wrong, what is worthy of death, what fulfills us during this present life, and how everyone will be judged before the Lord concerning eternal life and destiny.

God enables us to respond to Him, urging us to take the path of repentance and salvation. “He is . . . the husbandman of our souls, who pruneth away constantly whatever is to our hurt,” says Cyril of Alexandria, “so we may bring forth for Him fruits” (*Commentary on the Gospel of Saint Luke*, p. 389). Let us give up second-guessing God’s will and heed our Savior when He tells us to take up repentance as a way of life, so that we may receive God’s mercy.

*Deliver us from the evil thoughts of our hearts, O Lord, through the cleansing tears of repentance, that we may perfectly love Thee and worthily magnify Thy holy name.* – Episcopal Book of Common Prayer

**November 10 - Friday of the Twenty-fifth Week after Pentecost**  
**Luke 13:31-35**

**A Clash of Wills: Luke 13:31-35, especially vs. 34:** *“How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing.”* We resist the will of God, by and large, for our wants often clash with His. God wills to give us life, but we are “not willing” (vs. 34) – or worse, we want “to kill” Him (vs. 31).

Today’s Gospel contrasts three groups of people: first, the political and religious leaders of Jesus’ day who want to see Him removed (vs. 31); the ambivalent crowds who desire Him to exorcise their demons and cure their diseases (vs. 32), and yet resist Him; and finally the disciples He gathers to Himself (vs. 34), who hail Him as “He who comes in the name of the Lord!” (vs. 35). Even these will fail Him at the hour of His Passion.

It is possible to interpret the Pharisees’ warning (“Get out and depart from here, for Herod wants to kill You” – vs. 31) as a kind of helpful advice. Not all the Pharisees “were filled with rage” nor considered “what they might do to Jesus” (vs. 6:11). However, the Gospels suggest that most of them became His implacable enemies (vs. 11:54), and thus their warning carries a hostile overtone when they encourage the Lord Jesus to flee.

According to Saint Cyril of Alexandria, the Pharisees “saw the multitudes already repenting and receiving with eagerness faith in Him.” They know that they are “likely, therefore, to lose their office of being chiefs of the people, and as already fallen and expelled from their authority over them, and deprived of their profits” (*Commentary on the Gospel of Saint Luke*, p. 401).

Certainly Herod Antipas is uncomfortable with this popular teacher who attracts large crowds to Himself. Herod likes social concord, to be surrounded by subordinates who are supportive of his reign. Also, he has “heard of all that was done by Him and he was perplexed because it was said by some that John had risen from the dead” (vs. 9:7).

Then there are the crowds of people who come to the Lord Jesus while He is “journeying toward Jerusalem” (vs. 13:22). These come in hope. They have tangible economic, social, personal, and political needs. Their attraction to the Lord has a healthy side, like the impulses of those who go to physicians, pastors, or wise counselors. They need a cure for their diseases and release from demonic possession. Jesus has proven that power “went out from Him and healed them all” (vs. 6:19).

Christ our God, having “steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem” that He might “be received up” (vs. 9:51), also knows that His people resist Him and will one day demand His crucifixion. And so He grieves for them as “Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her” (vs. 13:34). The people are spiritually ill, “double minded” and “unstable” in all their ways (Jas 1:8).

Finally, let consider His own disciples. Most of them are yet to be healed of their passions. Not all are trustworthy, for one will betray Him, one deny Him, and the rest flee in panic.

Only after He has revealed the depth of their sin, the glory of God’s mercy, and the power of the Resurrection do the disciples repent, uniting themselves to Him to the point of death. They continue “steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42). He bears patiently with us as well, waiting for us to cry out to the One who comes in the name of the Lord.

*Arise, O compassionate One, and raise us with Thee from the depths of hades.* – Verse of Great and Holy Saturday

**November 11 - Saturday of the Twenty-fifth Week after Pentecost**  
**Luke 9:37-43**

**The Majesty of God: Luke 9:37-43, especially vs. 43:** “*And they were all amazed at the majesty of God.*” As the Lord Jesus heals a demon-possessed boy, He reveals His majesty in the form of His sovereign power and personal splendor. The plight of the child and his father—and the inability of the disciples to heal the boy—are vividly contrasted with Christ, who shows deep compassion for the child who is thrown “down and convulsed” by an “unclean spirit” (vs. 42). When the Lord “healed the child and returned him to his father” (vs. 42), all present are “amazed at the majesty of God.”

The Lord Jesus’ divine power and magnificence are evident to everyone witnessing these events (vs. 43). How is the majesty of God made evident in this healing? Four factors come together in the circumstances of this miracle. First, the Lord Jesus’ reputation for miracles is already well known in the region. As a result, the father brings to Him a son reduced to a most pitiable state by the dark powers. The Lord Jesus then displays His compassion by immediately responding to the father’s plea. Finally, a violent demonic assault takes place right before His eyes.

What unites these factors is Christ’s direct response. He rebukes the demon, heals the child, and gives him to the distraught father. God’s power and splendor are revealed in one majestic stroke.

To appreciate how the majesty of God is shown forth to the people who witness this healing, let us first consider why “a great multitude” meets the Lord as He descends from Mount Tabor (vs. 37). We can refresh our memories by briefly reviewing Saint Luke’s Gospel from chapter 4 onward, setting the present moment in the context of the larger narrative.

The Lord Jesus has long astonished people with His teaching, “for His word was with authority” (vs. 4:32). Reports about Him “went out into every place in the surrounding region” (vs. 37). For this reason crowds constantly come seeking Him (vs. 42) and wait for Him expectantly (vs. 8:40). Jesus’ teachings reveal God to be a merciful Father, kind to His children even when we are “unthankful” and “evil” (vss. 6:35-36).

When the Lord leaves the seclusion of Mount Tabor (vss. 9:28-36), He is immediately confronted by the troubled father: “Teacher, I implore You, look on my son, for he is my only child” (vs. 9:38). The boy is suffering seizures caused by demonic torment. One such assault is acted out by the insolent evil spirit (vs. 42) right before His eyes, as if to taunt Him: “What are You going to do about this?”

The power of God is thrown into even greater relief further by the fact that the Lord’s own disciples have not been able to heal the child (vs. 40). The consequences of human sin and bondage are manifest in the plight of the suffering child and his helpless community.

However, God’s majesty is not revealed merely through raw power. Along with the Lord Jesus’ capacity to heal, His divine majesty shines forth in His display of deep compassion. The Lord immediately “rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the child, and gave him back to his father” (vs. 42).

“They called upon the Lord, and He hearkened unto them” (Ps 98:7). Let us recognize the glory of our God and worship at the footstool of His feet. Here is a majesty that does not remain removed or detached, but rather a tender majesty that uses His infinite power creatively to bind up our wounds.

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

**November 12 - Twenty-fifth Sunday after Pentecost**  
**Luke 10:25-37**

**The Good Samaritan: Luke 10:25-37, especially vs. 33:** *“But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion.”* In the Parable of the Good Samaritan (vss. 30-35), Christ teaches us how the Church practices our faith through works of mercy. He describes a traveler, wounded by robbers, who is aided by a compassionate Samaritan. This merciful man invests his own time, energy, and resources to restore the injured stranger to life and health.

Saint John Chrysostom identifies the Samaritan as a type of Christ, while the wounded man is the human race and the inn a type of the Church as hospital. Reframing the account, Chrysostom enlarges the implications of the parable from a solitary act of kindness into an illustration of the redemptive action of God within the fallen world. We are all mortally wounded by sin, and as a result we departed “from the heavenly state to the state of the devil’s deception, and fell among thieves, that is, the devil and the hostile powers.”

Yes, our sins leave us with “no healing in [our] flesh” nor “peace in [our] bones” (Ps 37:3). Sin disturbs and disrupts our reasoning, emotional life, and will; even our bodies are corrupted. We find ourselves gravely ill. When we commit a sin we inevitably repeat it, for our thinking is “noisome” (vs. 5). Our emotions are aroused by the wrong desires, our wills are weak and infirm. We lose our ability to resist evil, and our capacity to choose purity. We are alienated from the life of God.

The true good Samaritan, Christ our Savior, comes from heaven to earth to rescue us wounded ones. He brings us to safety and pours oil over us at our baptism and chrismation. Saint John Chrysostom suggests that this oil speaks “the comforting word . . . which brings concentration to the scattered mind.”

The Good Samaritan also pours wine on the man’s wounds – Christ offerx His pure blood for our battered souls. “By mixing the Holy Spirit with His blood, He brought life to man,” says Chrysostom. Our participation in holy communion restores us to true health.

Then Christ sets us upon His own animal. “Taking flesh upon His own divine shoulders, He lifted it toward the Father in Heaven,” Chrysostom continues. Then the Lord “brought him to an inn, and took care of him” (Lk 10:34). Our Lord brings us poor travelers through this life and “into the wonderful and spacious inn, this universal Church.” We do not join the Church; it is God’s gift to us.

Let us consider the arrangement with the innkeeper who sees to the man’s continuing care. Saint John Chrysostom identifies this innkeeper with the Apostle Paul, who tells “the high priests and teachers and ministers of each church” to “take care of the people of the Gentiles whom I have given to you in the Church.

“Since men are sick, wounded by sin, heal them, putting on them a stone plaster, that is, the prophetic sayings and the Gospel teachings, making them whole through the admonitions and exhortations of the Old and New Testaments” (Vlachos, *Orthodox Psychotherapy*, p. 27-28).

Christ heals us through the mystical work of the Holy Spirit, pouring the life of God into our bodies, souls, and spirits. God dispels our delusions and the darkness of eternal death. But let us be patient. It will take time for the Good Samaritan to remove all the poison, corruption, and wounds that left us half dead along the road of life.

*O Christ, Thou only Lover of mankind, purify us who are wounded on our journey through this world, and pour on us the oil and wine of the Holy Spirit, that we may receive eternal life and healing for our souls.*

**November 13 - John 10:9-16 (11/13-11/26)**

**Feast of Saint John Chrysostom: Archbishop of Constantinople**

**Saved by Christ: Saint John 10:9-16, especially vs. 9:** *“I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved....”* Metropolitan of Nafpaktos Hierotheos describes the salvation that Orthodox Christians share: each person’s “...union with Christ is seen in many patristic writings. Saint Ignatios the Godbearer writes: ‘Perfect faith is Jesus Christ.’ Saint Maximos teaches: ‘We say that Christ is faith personified.’ Our oneness with Christ is confirmed by the virtues, which are fruits of the Holy Spirit.” Thus, union with Christ is stated three times as a personal affirmation at the Baptism of each Orthodox Christian as each one confirms three times.

Union with Christ is thoroughgoing, and so Metropolitan Hierotheos adds that “...the person who is...united with Christ, belongs to His real Body, which is the Church....” Body, soul, and heart are united to Christ as members of His tangible Body. Notice that Christ our God asserts this truth in the images of the present passage when He declares that He is “...the door” (vs. 9) through which we pass into His “...fold....” (vs. 16) to be members of His “...flock...” (vs. 16). Thus, the Metropolitan concludes, “Christ, then is inseparable from the Church, whose head He is, and the Church is inseparable from Christ, whose Body it is....This means we remain in the Church to attain our salvation....but we struggle to be saved as we remain in the Church.”

Take care, Metropolitan Hierotheos reminds us, not to consider union with Christ “...apart from the Holy Trinity, since Christ is the Second Person of the Holy Trinity and is united by nature with the Father and the Holy Spirit.” Notice that the Lord Jesus also makes this point in the reading when He says, “As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father...” (vs. 15).

Union with Christ is significant for salvation as no union with any one else can be. In the declarations of our Lord in this passage this significance is partially disclosed when He says, “...I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep” (vss. 10,11). The Apostle Paul opens up these words in two statements: 1) “...as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death....Therefore....if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection...” (Rom. 6: 3-5). 2) “If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God” (Col. 3:1). Christ’s salvation expands this present life “...abundantly” (vs. 10), for eternal life is attainable if we seek ‘the things which are above,’ in this present life.

Salvation has to do with life and death; but both life and death in Orthodox Christian terms are not limited to the material creation, but to the uncreated life of the risen Christ. Union with Him above all is ‘knowing Christ’ and ‘being known by Him’ (vs. 14), which are far more than a ‘knowledge about’ the Lord, but ‘knowing’ the Son of God in the heart by the lively work of the All-Holy Spirit. Saint Mark the Ascetic writes, “...it is necessary in the first place to have the grace of the Holy Spirit energizing the heart and so...to enter the kingdom of heaven.”

Never forget that when we were Baptized and Chrismated we only began, were initiated, only started the life in Christ. If we want His Life abundantly, then we must ‘...hear...’ His voice (vs. 16). Then we must work on union with Christ to grow “...the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God” (1 Pt. 3:4). The ascetic life that the Orthodox Church teaches has the power to help us grow and attain the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4:13). Fear losing salvation, ignoring Christ, leaving the Church, or forsaking prayer and the asceticism of self denial.

*May we complete the remaining time of our life in peace and repentance, O Lord.*

**November 14 - Tuesday of the Twenty-sixth Week after Pentecost**  
**Luke 14:25-35**

**Counting the Cost: Luke 14:25-35, especially vs. 33:** “So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.” We would do well, when reading this passage, to recall our baptismal profession of Christ as King and God. Satan constantly seeks to entice us away from the Lord by dazzling us with earthly joys, pleasures, and dreams. But this is not so with Christ our God. From the moment we join ourselves to Him, He tells us we must prefer Him even to our own families – wives, husbands, children – and to every earthly joy.

Indeed, He says bluntly, “If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple” (vs. 26). How do we understand such strong language?

Our Lord is concerned here with our priorities – where we choose to place on our affections. He surely expects us to love and give ourselves to our families before others. Christ’s call to follow Him, however, is of a different order. It calls us to go into combat, where we are willing to accept deadly risks on behalf of our loved ones.

The way of the Lord is called the “unseen warfare” because it is a battle with spiritual dimensions. It takes place in that realm where we express our affections of heart and soul. It all comes down to our preferences. Do we value things that concern the body more than matters of the soul and heart? We must sometimes choose between our natural affections and our overarching commitment to be “members and partakers of the death and Resurrection of Christ our God.”

The Lord Jesus is no deceiver; He tells us the truth. “Whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple” (vs. 27). We must be prepared for the possibility that we may be asked to confront or forsake family, loved ones, and even children for Christ’s sake.

As disciples, we walk along the same *via dolorosa* which the Lord Jesus followed to Golgotha and the Crucifixion. Family and friends may not go the distance with us when we face a painful choice between the priorities of this world and following the Savior.

The Lord Jesus does not play with us, nor does He entice us to make certain choices. He makes clear what can befall us if we continue to follow Him. It is wise for us to count the cost of discipleship, for He must come first. This is why the Lord sternly cautions us, lest we make an impulsive decision based merely on our attraction to Him.

Many Christians open their hearts and lives to the Lord. Many saints know the pain of preferring the Savior above all others. Yet still they encourage us to place Him first, “forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead [so that] we press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil 3:13-14).

When we take the awesome step of uniting ourselves to Christ, we must place our choices to be weighed in a balance. Let us consider what the world offers in light of Christ’s promises and gifts. He laid down His life for us, and He calls us His own.

Our enemies never rest in their opposition and yet, according to Saint John the Theologian, “He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world” (1 Jn 4:4). Let us be encouraged in our struggles! The most wrenching choices in life may or may not come upon us. However, we are forewarned – let us always be ready to place the Lord Jesus first at all times.

*O Christ our God, we who have put Thee on, beseech Thee, keep us ever warriors invincible in every attack of those who assail us and make us all victors even unto the end.* – Chrismation Prayer

**November 15 - Wednesday of the Twenty-sixth Week after Pentecost**  
**Luke 15:1-10**

**Repentance: Luke 15:1-10, especially vs. 10:** *“Likewise I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”* Christ our God invites us into His presence. How will we respond? Some people, like Matthew the apostle and evangelist, leave everything and follow Him (Mt 9:9). Others “turn back and walk with Him no more” (Jn 6:66). Among the big crowds accompanying the disciples, many never commit. Those who accept Christ’s invitation arrive at the kingdom only to find a sign posted at the entrance which reads, “Repent!”

Let us investigate, then, how repentance is connected with the Lord’s invitation, and with his search for the sheep “which was lost” (Lk 15:6). Perhaps we do not feel lost in this life, yet this is our true condition, nonetheless.

The Evangelist Luke begins with the observation that “all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him” (vs. 1) – they answer His invitation. May God grant us the grace to find ourselves among them! We all too easily draw near to Christ, hear what He says, and then go on about our business. We find many ways to deny the call of the Lord. Often, we simply choose to go along with other people in the crowd.

Sooner or later, however, we encounter the door with its message “Repent!” and see a crowd of sinners entering and falling down before the Lord. God helps us to understand that we really do belong with the tax collectors, scoundrels, and sinners. Furthermore, we discover that the Lord wants more from us than merely being sorry for our sins.

Good Shepherd that He is, the Lord Jesus comes into the wilderness we call life to do more than simply console us for our failures, small or large. According to the Apostle Paul, the Lord asks everyone who comes to Him to pass through the door of repentance – to go beyond the “worldly sorrow” of feeling badly about our actions. He asks us to *repent* – to struggle against our sinful attitudes and actions. He wants a true and godly repentance (see 2 Cor 7:10).

To discover what this means, we look to those whom the Lord our God restores to life. We find a hunger in the saints to become holy, pure, and free of sin, a state which goes far beyond feeling sorry for what was said or done.

The Lord Jesus’ search for us is patient and persistent, yet also tough and honest. He is the Good Shepherd who comes into the wilderness looking for His lost sheep “until He finds it” (Lk 15:4). When He finds that sheep “who repents” (vss. 7, 10), He carries it on His shoulders and rejoices (vs. 5). On His side of the story lies the joy, on our side true repentance and the honest effort to recover our humanity.

Yes, God is in the restoration business: He puts the sheep back into His fold, and the lost coins into His purse. What a tragedy it would be if we were to linger at the door of repentance without entering inside. A “broken and contrite heart” bleats like a lost sheep. The Shepherd hears those cries and runs to His loved ones. Those who “need no repentance” (vs. 7) miss the joy of being restored and healed – and also the subsequent celebration.

Concerning the Parable of the Lost Coin, Blessed Theophylact says: “You may understand the woman to signify the wisdom and power of God the Father, that is, His Son, who lost the one coin, man, from among the rational creatures created in the image of God, and who lights a lamp, His own flesh, to look for him. . . . The coin was found, bearing the image of the King, and there is joy for Him who found it” (*Explanation of the Holy Gospel According to Saint Luke*, p. 193).

God truly rejoices at our return (vs. 9). At every Divine Liturgy, we share in His celebration.

*O Thou who didst endure the Cross, and abolish death, and didst rise again from the dead; give peace to our life, O Lord: for Thou only art almighty .* – Resurrection Verse, Saturday Vespers

**November 16 - St Matthew 9:9-13 (11/16-11/29)**

**Gospel for the Feast of the Holy Apostle and Evangelist Matthew**

**To Be Worthy ~ Forsake All: Saint Matthew 9:9-13, especially vs. 9:** “As Jesus passed on from there, He saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, ‘Follow me.’ So he arose and followed Him.” Compare the line quoted above with the Evangelist Luke’s record of the Lord’s call of Matthew (of Levi); but notice especially the tax collector’s response: The Lord Jesus “...said to him, ‘Follow Me.’ So he left all, rose up, and followed Him” (Lk. 5:27,28). It would appear that Matthew was too humble to report that ‘he left all.’

Each of us who hears the call to discipleship must reckon with demands that will certainly come when following Christ. For the Lord clearly shows anyone who would follow Him to be prepared to ‘leave all.’ When the Lord said to Matthew, “Follow me,” no perks, conditions, promises, or advantages were advanced. Today’s world does not greatly favor the absolutist type of language the Lord uses to speak of discipleship: ‘hating one’s family, bearing one’s cross, forsaking all’ (see Lk. 14:26; 9:23; 5:28). Nevertheless, in modern idiom, the Lord Jesus is asking each of us plainly: “Are you going to fish or cut bait?”

Consider what Christ’s call implied for Matthew: as a tax collector, he had an assured economic base that provided good income. He had a circle of friends and colleagues among whom he was welcomed, who ate and drank with him, and who understood and supported him. These contract revenue agents were derided and excluded as “...tax collectors and sinners” (Mt. 9:11). Doubtless, they enjoyed each other’s company and the pleasures their employment and positions provided. Still, enlistment by the Lord placed all this comfort and security at risk. Notice: when Matthew followed, he left his employment, but not yet his friends. Soon though, he left them also. But first, the Lord, in great mercy, sat at table among them (vs. 10).

In many ways, our Lord is explicit about the risk involved in discipleship: “No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one, and despise the other...” (Mt. 6:24; see also Lk. 16:13). The Lord Jesus expresses a high level of risk when He speaks of ‘taking one’s cross’ (Mt. 10:38; Lk. 9:23). There are real implications in becoming a practicing Christian, especially if we are ever forced to choose for or against Christ. Are we ready with a willing heart to suffer humiliation, ignominy, pain and, possibly, even death? The cost of leaving all may vary in different circumstances, but cutting free from this world’s allegiances is a common element of discipleship for every true Christian.

Each disciple must decide about the risks of discipleship. As the Lord warns: “For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it, lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish’” (Lk. 14:28-30). Some have faced demands in the work place to compromise the truth or have been expected to help defraud customers or investors. Some have faced demands for sexual favors. Some have had their parents cut them off from the warmth and affection of the family for choosing to become Orthodox Christians. Be advised, and count the cost. Consider seriously, should the demand come: how ready am I to forsake all?

Many will say, “But to belong to the Church is not highly risky. Are not all these images a little overstated?” At this moment for you and me risks are minimal; but conditions change. There are, today, implacable enemies of Christian commitment ready to destroy us.

*Take from our hearts, O Lord, the fear to forsake all, that by Thy grace we exert that stern and irresistible earnestness which is worthy of Thine eternal and blessed Kingdom.*



**November 17 - Friday of the Twenty-sixth Week after Pentecost  
Luke 16:15-18; 17:1-4**

**No Individualists Allowed: Luke 16:15-18; 17:1-4, especially vs. 17:3:** *“Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him.”* Since Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay reached the summit of Mount Everest in 1953, many climbers have attempted to scale its deadly slopes. Often skilled mountaineers are forced back by winds and snow. Some die every year on the way up, or disappear before returning to their camps below. We learn from their bitter experience that loners and individualists most often fail to reach the summit, and run a greater risk of perishing. Only teams can succeed – and only then by working together and cooperating with the forces of nature.

Spiritual life works in a similar manner. The Pharisees listened to Jesus’ teachings, and yet they still “derided Him” (vs. 14). In kindness and wisdom, He warns them – and all other foolish spiritual individualists – that certain failure awaits those who rely on their own spiritual strength and worthiness to attain the kingdom of Heaven. Traveling our own, it is not going to happen!

The solo spiritual athlete may be highly esteemed in some circles, but he remains “an abomination in the sight of God” (vs. 15). He never grasps the truth that “it is impossible that no offenses should come” (vs. 17:1). Indeed, “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23).

Do we not recognize ourselves as crippled spiritual athletes? Do we think we can succeed by striving on our own to please God? The wounds of sin lead us inevitably toward death, for “this is the counsel for all the nations. Death prevailed and swallowed them” (Is 25:7-8).

God alone can overcome spiritual defeat and death. These enemies remain at large, unless the spiritual power of God intervenes to deliver us. The high divorce rate proves our fallibility (Lk 16:18). Christ our Lord makes it clear that even the one who “says, ‘You fool!’ shall be in danger of hell fire” (Mt 5:22). May God help us to get over the idea that we will find our way into the kingdom of God using our own wit and wisdom.

“Since . . . the kingdom of God has been preached . . . everyone is pressing into it” (Lk 16:16). Will our personal efforts to reach this goal prove futile? Not necessarily, for God is kind. He knows when our hearts long to work *with* Him, just as He knows when we are deluded and believe that we do not need Him or the Church to attain the spiritual summit (vs. 15).

All us of who are committed Christ our God, and who depend upon Him as we try to *press into* the kingdom, make the same wise choices as successful mountain climbing teams. We do not go it alone. We join others. We develop the spiritual powers extended to us. We cultivate patience, spiritual attentiveness, and unquestioning faith in God. Lastly, we care for the other members of our team who are answering the same “upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil 3:14).

Let us remember these simple requirements. We are to belong to the Church, working with our team leaders (the clergy) while taking care not to “offend one of these little ones” (Lk. 17:2) – our brethren in Christ. We do not rebuke a brother or sister in Christ who sins against us (vs. 3), but forgive them (v. 4).

*O Thou who hast bestowed on us these common and united supplications, now also fulfill the desires and petitions of Thy servants as may be most expedient for us.* – Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom

**November 18 - Saturday of the Twenty-sixth Week after Pentecost**  
**Luke 9:57-62**

**What Comes Next? Luke 9:57-62, especially vss. 57-58:** “Now it happened as they journeyed on the road, that someone said to Him, ‘Lord, I will follow You wherever You go.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.’” In this passage three nameless individuals encounter Christ. After they meet Jesus, they return to other activities. What happens to us after we meet the Lord is crucial. When we join Him in baptism, we receive a name and follow Him. What comes next?

“A cloud resembles a cloud, a man resembles a man, and a world resembles a world,” says Saint Nikolai of Zicha. “But one cloud is illusory dry smoke, while another is full of thunder and rain. One man exists, while the other is nonexistent, even though one resembles the other. . . . He who brings you into the world brings life into a shell of life, brings water into empty wells, and a song into muted throats” (*Prayers by the Lake*, p. 169).

Our baptism into Christ our God is the crucial beginning. However, the goal of all those who are united to Him is to remain eternally in the memory of God. The apostles meet the Lord at the beginning of His ministry. Then what? They follow Him, staying near Him.

A man tells Jesus, “I will follow You wherever You go” (vs. 57). However, the Lord rebukes him. According to Saint Cyril of Alexandria, the man’s “wish was not simply to follow Christ . . . but rather to thrust himself into apostolic honors.” Saint Paul warns, “No man takes this honor to himself, but he who is called by God” (Heb 5:4).

The man might have followed the Lord quietly, as many are doing at that very time (see Lk 9:11). “But this man,” adds Saint Cyril, “boldly took upon himself gifts thus altogether honorable and, though no one called him, thrust himself into that which was above his rank” (*Commentary on the Gospel of Saint Luke*, p. 246-47).

Christ’s rebuke discloses the man’s fault. The Lord says, in effect, “You appear interested in position and security, but I have nothing worth giving of this world. Animals and birds have more to offer than I do.” Christ reads our hearts; he warns the presumptuous man and calls him to the way of virtue. “Seek those things which are above” (Col 3:1).

However, the Lord Jesus does not rebuke this man as sharply as He does Peter. He tells the well-meaning but hapless apostle, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me; for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men” (Mt 16:23).

The Lord actually calls the second man to follow Him, but he demurs. “Lord, let me first go and bury my father” (Lk 9:59). Our Lord does not allow what might seem like a reasonable request, for Christ’s call is without qualification – He asks for all, or nothing at all. Then what? Presumably, the man leaves to take care of his family business, and misses his opportunity to be united with Christ.

As disciples of Christ, we are asked to follow our Lord down a hard road. Our response is crucial. Many times we say, “Yes, but first I have to. . .” Diversions abound, keeping us from growing closer to Christ. Our enemy is subtle and clever. Attentiveness is crucial for us disciples. When we answer, “Yes, Lord,” He shows the way.

A third man volunteers for the opportunity the second man has lost, but he repeats the mistakes of his predecessors. He asks for a chance to bid his family farewell (vs. 61). Then what? The Lord again makes clear that He asks for all or nothing (vs. 62). The Lord Jesus is calling us – what next?

*May I find the right way through repentance. I am a lost sheep. O Savior, save me. –*  
Memorial Service for the Departed

**November 19 - Twenty-sixth Sunday after Pentecost  
Luke 12:16-21**

**Rich Toward God: Luke 12:16-21, especially vss. 20-21:** “God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?’ So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.” If we are to be “rich toward God, it means that our perceptions, choices, and actions should increasingly reflect that “mind . . . which was also in Christ Jesus” (Phil 2:5). In another place, the Apostle Paul confirms that we are to “have the mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2:16).

If we are honest, we know that we do not truly have the Lord’s mind. We labor to gain even a small particle of the mind of the Lord! Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit lives in the Church. The essential elements of Christ’s views on wealth, life, death, and eternal salvation are well known to us.

The decisions we face each day, along with the demands thrust upon us by outward circumstances, provide us with many opportunities to exercise the mind that is in the Lord. “Since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind,” urges Saint Peter, “for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God” (1 Pt 4:1-2).

The saints, that great “cloud of witnesses,” show us how to “lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and . . . run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith” (Heb 12:1-2).

The saints express an attitude opposite to the parable in today’s Gospel, which concerns a man with no awareness of God whatsoever. Being rich, for him, is strictly a matter of having “many goods laid up for many years.” He tells himself, “Take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry” (Lk 12:19).

Our modern culture certainly encourages us to have the mind of this “certain rich man” whose ground “yielded plentifully” (vs. 16). He thinks of nothing beyond saving his bounty, and so he “lays up treasure for himself” (vs. 21). We find proponents of this very rational idea all around us.

In reality, this man is truly impoverished and shriveled up inside. The very feasting and banqueting he relishes is exactly what the contemporary world suggests that we pursue. The prophets see through these delusions: “Nay, all things are vanity, every man living. Surely man walketh about like a phantom, nay, in vain doth he disquiet himself. He layeth up treasure, and knoweth not for whom he shall gather it” (Ps 38:7-9).

How does the mind of Christ Jesus operate? The fields in which He sows the seeds of life are the hearts of men and women (Lk 8:5). They produce a bountiful harvest of “devout men, from every nation under heaven” (Acts 2:5). He continues to fashion us into “a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy” (1 Pt 2:9-10).

Christ does not store away this holy nation for His exclusive delight. He shares the wealth of His harvest with all people, because His heart and mind are rich with eternity and filled with His Father’s will. Indeed, in our Lord Jesus Christ we find the true rich man who shares His bounty with us, “making many rich” (2 Cor 6:10). He invites us to join Him in the harvest and to sit with Him at glorious table of the harvesters’ banquet.

*Glory to Thee who hath shown us the light . . . for Thou only art holy, Thou only art the Lord. . . . Every day will I bless Thee, and I will praise Thy name forever. – Doxology*

**November 20 - Monday of the Twenty-seventh Week after Pentecost**  
**Luke 17:20-25**

**The Kingdom Within: Luke 17:20-25, especially vss. 20-21:** “Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, ‘The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, “See here!” or “See there!” For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you.’” According to Archimandrite Vasileios, “the kingdom of God is not a Talmud, nor is it a mechanical collection of scriptural or patristic quotations outside our being and our lives. The kingdom of God is within us, like a dynamic leaven which fundamentally changes man’s whole life, his spirit and his body” (*Hymn of Entry*).

His position runs counters to the implications of contemporary translations, which often render the words *entos umon estin* in the original Greek differently than what we read here (“is within you” – vs. 21). This correct wording discloses the unbroken patristic teaching which guides our lives as Orthodox Christians.

Perhaps modernist translators reject Holy Tradition because the Lord Jesus’ answer does not correspond precisely to the question asked by the Pharisees. They seek His opinion as to “when the kingdom of God would come” (vs. 20). However, He speaks of *where* the kingdom is found. Saint Isaac of Syria affirms that “the kingdom of the heavens is within you” (*ACCS New Testament*, vol. 3, p. 270). We do not look for it in a place!

The common meaning of *entos* is “within,” not “among” or “amidst.” What Blessed Theophylact says of the Pharisees may also be applied to the modern mind: “The Lord shows that they are ignorant of that which is within them, although those who so desire may easily understand it” (*Explanation of the Holy Gospel According to Saint Luke*, p. 226).

The Lord Jesus follows His reply to the Pharisees with a word directed to His disciples (vss. 22-25). Our Savior guards us against the false idea that we can locate the kingdom of God here or there. It is in the depths of the heart, implanted in the center of our being.

Until the Lord returns to earth and His kingdom is revealed like “lightning that flashes out of one part under heaven shines to the other part” (vs. 24), we do not look anywhere else, expect anything else, or go to a specific place or location. The truth our Lord reveals lies within every one of us. We need only listen to Him.

According to Saint Cyril of Alexandria, “the kingdom of God is within you. For ask not, He says, about the times in which the season of the kingdom of heaven shall again arise and come; but rather be in earnest that ye may be found worthy of it, for it is within you, that is, it depends upon your own wills, and is in your own power, whether or not you receive it” (*Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Luke*, p. 271).

Saint Cyril reminds us that the kingdom is not far from any man – not even the deluded Pharisees, nor anyone willing to look where Christ directs us. We do not need to wait for the day of our Lord’s return to see it, to taste of its life-giving fruits and be transformed by God’s visible reign. We need only to enter into our hearts with the help of the Holy Spirit, as the Church Fathers teach.

How may we reach this kingdom in our heart? We strive together with the Holy Spirit! “The activity of the virtues is a foretaste of the kingdom of heaven,” says Saint Gregory of Sinai. “We must realize that the commandments are activities producing effects” (*Philokalia* vol. 4, p. 219).

God’s commandments never burden nor enslave us. “Therefore, let him who would be free be a servant in the Lord, for inasmuch as we partake of servitude, we partake also the Kingdom,” urges Saint Ambrose of Milan (*Exposition of the Holy Gospel According to Saint Luke*, p. 347).

*Enlighten the eyes of my heart by Thy grace, unto fulfillment of Thy commandments.* – Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom

**November 21 - St Luke 10:38-42; 11:27-28 (11/21-12/4)**

**The Entrance of the Theotokos into Temple**

**Getting Down to Cases: *Saint Luke 10:38-42; 11:27-28, especially vs. 38:*** “*Now it happened as they went that He entered a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha received Him into her house.*” These verses are especially familiar to Orthodox Christians, being used at the Feasts of the Theotokos, including her Nativity, Protection, Presentation, and Dormition. The first line brings the reader into the home of Martha of Bethany to hear her complaint about her sister and to hear the Lord’s observation that Mary “...has chosen the good part...” (vss. 41,42).

This particular passage opens with the phrase, “Now it happened...” in which Saint Luke refers to Bethany as a “certain village,” and the “certain woman” is identified as Martha (vs. 38). These linguistic devices push us to get down to the specifics of people, times, and places, for God is concerned with all of life’s details. Moments, places, people, and events are tangible vehicles through which God reveals Himself. The Entrance of the Virgin into the Temple as a child calls attention to the specifics of the God-Man getting down to actual cases.

As with all Feasts of the Holy Theotokos, God reveals that nothing is accidental. Our Faith rejects the fallacy that some events in creation and history are happenstance or random probabilities. Still, even if an event is deemed accidental, it is not outside the plan, the economy, of God, beyond His capacity to act outside His laws to save us. From the viewpoint of Faith, events are accidental only by standing in a subordinate relationship to “...the mystery of Christ...as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets...” (Eph. 3:4,5).

The winners of world athletic competitions, of national elections, or even of wars, are connected to God’s redemption of this world as actors in a history totally managed by God. At a certain time, in a certain place, a particular girl child was brought to a particular Temple. That event must be counted as highly significant and not at all accidental. That young girl and that Temple were specific links in a chain of events leading up to the Incarnation of God the Word as a man. When Mary was presented in the Temple, God, in a most precise manner, was preparing the key event of all history. The truth is always in the details.

Every event within creation, from the tiniest cell division to some major shift in the continental plates, tsunamis, and earthquakes must be judged in relationship to God’s design. Physical events may seem less important than are historical actions. Yet, when a Virgin woman conceived and brought forth a son, that physical event turned out to be ‘the’ significant event of the entire natural order and human history. We learn from Christ’s virgin birth that “All creation is merely a story about Him,” as Saint Nikolai of Zhicha says. God superseded the natural order that He might send “...forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons” (Gal. 4:4,5).

The Faith urges us to revise our vision both of nature and history. In history, we confront the factor of human freedom within the plan of God, wherein the Lord of all uses even men’s most violent opposition to fulfill His plan. So, the Herods repeatedly opposed the work of God; but, in the end, they and their actions contributed to the truth of “...Jesus Christ our Lord...born of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead” (Rom. 1:3,4). God triumphs in the details. The Devil would like to manage the details; but he is merely a creature of God, fallen as we are ourselves. Our hope in Christ is not wishful longing, but rock certainty.

*“Let every breath praise the Lord. Praise Him for His mighty acts, praise Him according to the multitude of His greatness”*(Ps. 150:6,2). *To Thee, O God, is due our song.*

**November 22 - Wednesday of the Twenty-seventh Week after Pentecost**  
**Luke 18:15-17, 26-30**

**To Be a Child Again: Luke 18:15-17, 26-30, especially vss. 26-27:** “And those who heard it said, ‘Who then can be saved?’ But He said, ‘The things which are impossible with men are possible with God.’” When Jesus instructs us to receive the kingdom of God as a little child (vs. 17), we hear echoes of Nicodemus’ quandary (Jn 3:4). How do we become guileless as little children, yearning for our Father like infants? As adult Christians, how do we recover our purity of heart and become re-established as children of God the Father?

We take a step toward becoming children again by realizing that everyone is religious in some fashion. We all pay homage to something, or someone, above all else. Whatever we devote ourselves to is the “god” we serve. Our temple may be dedicated to the worship of comfort, wealth, prestige, ego, sex, pleasure, power, health, duty, or pleasing others. Potential idols are everywhere.

The Lord Jesus separates us from this array of false divinities. He calls us to become whole, free, holy children who depend primarily on our Father in heaven. To do so means to break the hold of every idol “for the sake of the kingdom of God” (Lk 18:29). We must join our entire will and our desires to the will of the true God, our heavenly Father. This is a tough assignment that requires long struggle.

Of course, detaching from our idols and uniting ourselves to God occurs only *after* we become aware of what we actually worship and serve. Hence, becoming a child of God begins with close observation of ourselves. We must discover the dependencies and slavish commitments that rule our lives.

“We love our flesh exceedingly and with it everything carnal, material, and earthly,” Saint John of Kronstadt reminds us (*My Life in Christ*, p. 234). According to Saint Cyril of Alexandria, this means “putting entirely away from us habits of wickedness” (*Commentary on the Gospel of Saint Luke*, p. 484).

Clearly, this struggle requires divine assistance. Christ has blessed us with the riches of the Orthodox ascetical tradition, from which we learn how the demonic powers mask themselves behind our seemingly “harmless” idols. The first step is to identify what attachments dominate us, for that is the key to how we may break their tyranny.

According to Saint John Climacus, “He who has an attachment to anything visible is not yet delivered from grief. For how is it possible not to be sad at the loss of something we love? We need to have great vigilance in all things. But we must give our whole attention to this above everything else” (*Ladder of Divine Ascent* 2.7, p. 12-13).

When we break free of even one of the worldly “gods” that control our life, we are more able to live “in a simple and innocent manner, practicing gentleness and Christ’s priceless humility, and readily forbearing from wrath and spitefulness,” according to Saint Cyril.

Saint Paul tells us we live in a more childlike manner when we “put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts” (Rom 13:14). Let us be cautious, however, and prepare for a long battle if we desire to achieve the father-son relationship revealed to us by our Lord Jesus.

As we grow in Christ, He helps us see which idols we serve. He floods our hearts with His love and awakens us to Himself. Then, as God’s children, we can say with Jeremiah, “But I have not become weary in following after You, nor have I desired the day of man” (Jer 17:12).

*With my whole heart have I sought after Thee, cast me not away from Thy commandments. In my heart have I hid Thy sayings, that I might not sin against Thee. Blessed art Thou, O Lord, teach me Thy statutes.* – Psalm 118:10-12

**November 23 - Thursday of the Twenty-seventh Week after Pentecost**  
**Luke 18:31-34**

**The Whole Gospel: Luke 18:31-34, especially vs. 34:** *“But they understood none of these things; this saying was hidden from them, and they did not know the things which were spoken.”* Today’s Gospel selection is only four verses long – quite short compared to many of the daily passages appointed by the Church. Yet this brief reading contains all the elements of the Gospel of salvation. God the Word assumes human nature, suffers and embraces death on behalf of all men, and rises from the dead on the third day. He gives birth to a community – the Church – to whom He reveals the meaning of these events.

This passage begins with our Savior taking the twelve aside (vs. 31) and declaring everything that will soon happen – to Him, and to them. And still, “they understood none of these things” (vs. 34). What He is doing and “saying was hidden from them” (vs. 34), its meaning not fully grasped even by His closest associates.

The saving acts of God that Jesus Christ undertook for our race are called the Gospel, or good news. The Church presents these actions to the world as precious pearls. Our Lord strings them together into a single beautiful strand and drapes them about the neck of the Church, His bride.

The gracious acts of Christ our God are the foundation of our proclamation of salvation. They are the essence of the message we call divine revelation. The human race has devoted many hours to finding the key to the ultimate reality – to finding the God from whom comes life. Our human efforts have produced the world’s wide array of religions and philosophies.

Only when God deliberately reveals Himself to us in human flesh, however, do we find our way into the infallible community that joins humanity to God. This revelation occurs at God’s initiative, to His chosen witnesses. We are now inheritors of what God showed the first disciples.

For this reason we do not read the words, “He took the twelve aside and said to them . . .” (vs. 31), as some historical footnote about past events. Rather, we being made privy to God’s self-revelation to all men. It is living history, for He speaks to us today, whether or not we listen.

When the Lord speaks, the Twelve “did not know the things which were spoken” (vs. 34). Soon, however, “Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God . . . by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him” (Acts 2:22) will become the only topic of which the Twelve wish to speak: “This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses” (vs. 2:32).

As we look at the pearls on the strand of revelation, we first encounter the Passion of Christ our God. “For He will be delivered to the Gentiles and . . . mocked and insulted and spit upon. They will scourge Him and kill Him” (Lk 18:32-33).

These events are conveyed verbally during Christ’s briefing of the disciples. Later, they will witness the actual events. While all four Gospels contain extended narratives of the Lord’s Passion (Mt 26-27; Mk 14-15; Lk 22-23; Jn 18-19), Christ our God summarizes these events here in just two sentences.

The greatest pearl, of course, is the Resurrection. Life gleams from the center of the strand: “And the third day He will rise again” (Lk 18:33). Every eleven weeks, during Sunday orthros, the Church reads through the written accounts of Christ’s Resurrection. These records attest that our Lord presented Himself alive after His suffering “by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3). The Gospel, the good news, is now complete!

*Verily, O Jesus, Thou hast risen as Thou didst foretell, and bestowed life eternal upon us. –*  
Paschal Verse

**November 24 - Friday of the Twenty-seventh Week after Pentecost**  
**Luke 19:12-28**

**Each One's Gain: Luke 19:12-28, especially vs. 15:** *“And so it was that when he returned, having received the kingdom, he then commanded these servants, to whom he had given the money, to be called to him, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading.”* Jesus' Parable of the Ten Minas stands at the heart of today's Gospel passage. The parable points ahead to the time of our Lord's return, when each disciple will be assessed. Hence, our Lord urges us to invest the “spiritual capital” He has entrusted to us, for He will look for growth as evidence of what we have gained from the love, grace, and power we receive through the Holy Spirit.

At first, a serious misapprehension of Jesus' teaching develops among the disciples. They believe that “the kingdom of God would appear immediately” (vs. 19:11). However, the Lord dispels this error, showing us that each disciple must apply himself wisely and energetically now, in order to deliver some gain later on the spiritual capital our Savior commits to him. Spiritual idleness and relaxation is a great and ever-present temptation. May we be energetic and prudent followers in handling the riches of Christ's kingdom!

Also, let us remember that the kingdom of God comes in stages. In the present age, our lives are enriched by the holy mysteries that raise us up, to a certain degree, to “sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” But when He returns, He will “show the exceeding riches of His grace . . . toward us” (Eph 2:7). We build on what we receive now, so that later we may gain more!

In a hidden way the kingdom of God is at work throughout human history – in particular, through the actions of those who embrace and invest the good things of God's reign. One day, when the Lord returns, the kingdom will become the sole reality operating in all of creation. Our request, “Thy kingdom come,” will then be completely fulfilled.

For each of us individually, our personal accounting with respect to the riches of the kingdom comes when we repose (Heb 9:27). Later, at the Lord's Second Coming, the implications of God's judgment upon each of us will be realized eternally to its full extent.

Let us never forget that this present life is *the* decisive period of our existence. Woe to us if we have been entrusted with the Master's riches – if we receive the mysteries of Christ – and do not put them to work because we are lazy and slack. According to Blessed Theophylact, each of us receives an equal gift. Each has been entrusted with “one mina” (one pound); we either use this gift well, or become careless and lazy.

“You have received the very same gift as Peter and Paul,” he insists. “If they received a pound, and you also received a pound, but then did not benefit yourself at all to labor for the good, why do you blame God?” (*Explanation of the Holy Gospel According to Saint Luke*, p. 254).

According to the parable, each servant receives the same amount. There are ten servants and ten mina, one for each. The saints receive no more than any one of us. The command is the same to all: “Do business till I come” (Lk 19:13).

The Lord issues a direct order. His command implies that a test of faithfulness is given to each of us. When we were illuminated at our baptism and chrismation, we received the remission of sins, the seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit, and participation in the holy communion. The Lord will ask us what we did with this “mina” He provided. It is up to us to invest them in ourselves, and in everyone we meet. As we make such efforts, He will help our investment to grow and be enlarged in others.

*Enable me, O Lord, to be faithful, even unto the end, through Thy crown incorruptible.* – Prayer at Chrismation



**November 25 - Saturday of the Twenty-seventh Week after Pentecost**  
**Luke 10:19-21**

**Cause To Rejoice: Luke 10:19-21, especially vs. 20:** “Rejoice because your names are written in heaven.” Having our names “written in heaven” is a joy to contemplate. If we persist in sin, the Lord may reluctantly blot out our names from the Book of Life forever – but for now our names are written in heaven. Glory to Jesus Christ!

The Church declares that her sacred acts on earth are recorded in the heavenly realms. They reverberate forcefully back to earth in our daily lives, forming an interactive movement within the holy Mysteries. With the Lord’s assurance, the Church prays in the belief that whatever she asks will be answered on earth by God the Father for the sake of His only begotten Son (Jn 16:23).

For example, following the great Eucharistic prayer of the anaphora in the Divine Liturgy, we pray “for the precious Gifts which have been spread forth and sanctified . . . that our God who loveth mankind, receiving them upon His holy, most heavenly and ideal altar as a savor of spiritual sweetness, will send down upon us in return His divine grace and the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

The “gifts” referred to in this prayer are the bread and wine sanctified by the Holy Spirit: Christ’s immaculate Body and precious Blood. The prayer asks God to accept these offerings upon His altar in heaven (Rv 8:3) and to send down upon us in return His grace by the Holy Spirit. We present the bread and wine – the fruit of our life and labors, all that we are, and all that we have – to God as an offering of ourselves as His servants. Our human actions both ask for and anticipate a divine response.

This same theo-logic applies to private prayer. Hence we say, “Great art Thou, O Lord, and marvelous are Thy works. . . .” We ask at baptism that a person “may be transformed; that he may put away from him the old man . . . and that he may be clothed upon with the new man.” Our expectation leads us to place great confidence in baptism, chrismation, and communion – in the Mystery of Christ. Each one of us is “a reason-endowed sheep in the holy flock of . . . Christ, an honorable member of . . . the Church, a child of the light, and an heir of . . . the Kingdom.”

In this present age, in whatever state of life we find ourselves, this is our heritage in Christ. Our names are written in heaven. This is the truth that our Lord Christ is teaching in the present reading. We can look heavenward with confidence.

Still, we find no reason to take our registration in the Book of Life as a matter of pride – as if it were our own achievement– and presume that God *owes* us something. “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that is not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (Eph 2:8-9).

Our names are recorded out of God’s pure loving-kindness and mercy, and will remain so until God assesses our entire life. At present “we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Eph 2:10). We have work to do, but let us not become discouraged. There is much hope for us.

The Lord extends to us the “authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy” (Lk 10:19). He would have us be victors in this life and for eternity. According to Saint Theophan the Recluse, we re to “ask for God’s help . . . with warm and humble prayers; for this is His gift. . . . Then stand daringly before the Almighty God in firm belief that in His great loving-kindness He will grant you this” (*Unseen Warfare*, p. 83). Our Lord says, “Nothing shall by any means hurt you” (vs. 19). Nothing can or ever shall separate us from the love of God (Rom 8:38-39).

*In Thy tender loving-kindness, O my Christ, assist Thy servant to be a child of the light.* –  
Baptismal Prayer

**November 26 - Twenty-seventh Sunday after Pentecost**  
**Luke 13:10-17**

**To Heal All: Luke 13:10-17, especially vs. 16:** “*So ought not this woman . . . be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath?*” During the reign of King Asa of Judah (911-870 BC), the Prophet Hanani reproaches the king for making defensive treaties with pagans instead of relying upon God (2 Chr 16:7-9). The prophet reminds King Asa of a basic truth: “The eyes of the Lord look over the whole earth, and strengthen every heart that is loyal to Him” (vs. 9). When the Lord Jesus heals the bent woman in today’s reading He offers healing to all present, just as today He still seeks to renew “every heart that is loyal to Him.”

Note that Jesus does two things when he heals the woman: first, He declares that she is loosed from her infirmity (Lk 13:12), and then He lays His hands on her (vs. 13). There is an important difference between the manner in which our Lord heals and the healings in the Old Testament, according to Saint Cyril of Alexandria: “Each of the holy prophets, if anywhere at all they wrought any miracle, is seen to have done it by the power of God.” The ancients fall on their faces before the Almighty and beseech Him with appropriate words of prayer, but “Christ, the Savior of all, offers no prayer, but refers the accomplishment of the matter to His own power, healing her by a word and the touch of the hand” (Homily 96, *Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Luke*, p. 391).

To avoid overwhelming the multitudes gathered in the synagogue, Christ Jesus departs from the familiar pattern employed by the Old Covenant saints for gaining God’s compassion and healing. He behaves in a way that befits His divine nature, awakening the crowds to His divinity so that they will turn to Him and be healed. Our Lord never overwhelms or forces His witnesses to believe in Him. Instead, He leads them to trust in Him for healing. In response, “all the multitude rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by Him” (vs. 17).

The Lord is censured for working on the Sabbath, which is contrary to the Law of Moses (Ex 20:8-11). However, He admonishes the ruler of the synagogue for condemning Him and points out the contradictions in the man’s thinking. As a result, the ruler and other *adversaries* of the Lord “were put to shame” (Lk 13:15-17). The Lord yearns for them to be healed from their false thinking, but they miss the opportunity to have their hearts restored. Instead, as Blessed Theophylact says, they “burned with rage that He had healed at all” (*Explanation of the Holy Gospel According to Saint Luke*, p. 170).

If Jesus’ adversaries had observed His unique, divine manner of healing, they might have understood that God’s commandment to rest on the Sabbath applied only to men and beasts – not to Himself! God did rest on the Sabbath (Gn 2:2) and yet He never ceases to provide for us. If the sun were to leave its course and the rivers stop running on the Sabbath, what disasters would befall us!

By laying His hand upon the bent woman, our Lord uses His human nature to show us a higher means of healing. Saint Cyril of Alexandria says that the Lord’s action indicates to us “that His holy flesh bore in it the power and activity of God. Thereby, He revealed that the Incarnation of the Word and His assumption of human nature took place for the overthrow of death and the destruction, and of that envy nourished against us by the wicked serpent.”

We are initiated into this holy mystery! Let us rejoice, for we are privileged to partake of the same healing from this same life-giving Lord and God.

*O Lord, may Thy life-giving Mysteries be for the healing of our souls and bodies.* – Prayer of Thanksgiving After Holy Communion

**November 27 - Monday of the Twenty-eighth Week after Pentecost**  
**Luke 19:37-44**

**To Weep and To Laugh: Luke 19:37-44, especially vss. 37, 41:** “Then, as He was now drawing near the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God . . . . Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it. . . .” What a contrast between the reaction of the Lord Jesus and that of His disciples! They rejoice with overflowing praise, for they are entering the holy city of Jerusalem with One whom they believe to be the Messiah. And yet Jesus weeps. How far do the ways of the infinite God lie beyond us, even when we receive the privilege of walking in close company with Him!

In his gospel, Saint Luke guides us ever deeper into the mystery of Christ (Eph 3:4), illuminating the ways of God as revealed by Light Himself. The evangelist starts with the Lord Jesus’ birth in the flesh “of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary” (Nicene Creed). He moves through the days of Christ’s earthly ministry, drawing steadily closer to the moment when the Savior knows the time has come to be received up – the moment when He must “steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem” (Lk 9:51). From that point forward Saint Luke focuses on the Lord Jesus’ predictions of His Passion, the mounting opposition against Him, and His solemn warnings concerning the cost of discipleship.

In this brief transition passage, Saint Luke initiates his account of the last days of the Lord Jesus’ Judean ministry. It is the season immediately prior to Christ’s arrest – the penultimate days in which God still shares the course of daily human life before embracing “that Passion which was for the salvation of the whole world, to free the inhabitants of the earth from the tyranny of the enemy, and abolish death, and destroy the sin of the world” (Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Luke*, Homily 130, p. 514). In Solomon’s words, it is both “a time to weep and a time to laugh” (Ecc 3:4).

By now the disciples have seen Jesus heal incurable diseases, overcome demons, feed crowds, and subdue natural forces. Quite naturally they “began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice” (vs. 37) as they witness His coming into Jerusalem. Having observed His “mighty works” (vs. 37) first hand, they possess clear, tangible evidence that Jesus is the long-awaited “King who comes on the name of the Lord” (vs. 38) and will, in the popular view of the day, inaugurate God’s kingdom

God’s people had endured many difficulties since the days of King David, with bad years far outnumbering the good. Now, with the nation’s social, political, and economic life under Roman control, the nation cries out for God to empower a new leader who can usher in genuine freedom and independence. The people are in constant expectation: “O my Strength, I will keep watch for Thee, for Thou, O God, art my helper” (Ps 58:9). All eyes naturally focus on Jesus, for He possesses divine power and abundant spiritual resources. In Him there is reason for joy and praise and a time of laughter.

Ironically, as the Lord draws near the city, He “wept over it” (Lk 19:41). He sees beyond the surface issues of politics and economics, penetrating into matters of heart and soul “that make for your peace” (vs. 42). He sees how sin blinds people, keeping truth “hidden from your eyes” (vs. 42).

He understands that the Romans and the Herods are only symptoms of a deeper problem: the people’s “foolish hearts were darkened” (Rom 1:21). God’s people refuse to repent and cleanse their hearts, even though their city is about to be destroyed (Lk 19:43-44). In their wrath, they will crucify Him. They will fight the Romans and lose. Soon, it will be a time to weep.

*O Thou who are inapprehensible, who of Thine own compassion didst bear all things, saving all from the curse, O long-suffering Lord, glory to Thee. – Vespers for Great and Holy Friday*

**November 28 - Tuesday of the Twenty-eighth Week after Pentecost**  
**Luke 19:45-48**

**Cleanse Thy Church: Luke 19:45-48, especially vs. 46:** “It is written, ‘My house is a house of prayer,’ but you have made it a den of thieves.” The Apostle Paul reminds us that we, who are the Church, are also “the temple of the living God. As God has said: ‘I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My People’” (2 Cor 6:16; Lv 26:12; Ez 37:27).

The admonition contained in this portion of Saint Luke’s gospel is directed at our own church communities, for the identical judgment will be levied against us if we defame God’s temple. History affirms the potential for such tragedy. Often, in order to advance the material prosperity of the institutional Church, Christian communities reject the primary task of God’s people – to be a *house of prayer*.

The drive for material success can subtly, at times even blatantly, reduce Christ to an inconvenience that needs reinterpretation. “The chief priests, the scribes, and the leaders of the people [who] sought to destroy [Jesus]” (Lk 19:47) clearly know that the God we meet through prayer can, and will, disrupt our worldly goals.

Since God has *chosen* us as *precious* “living stones . . . being built up a spiritual house” (1 Pt 2:4-5), it is incumbent on us to protect the holy communities and jurisdictions of God’s Church. Let us never allow some aspect of church life – be it a committee, a parish, a diocese, or whatever – to be tragically turned into a materialistic program or an institution with earthly, measurable goals. Prayerful reflection on this portion of Luke’s gospel reveals how the Lord Jesus would preserve us from such a pitfall.

First, we are to purify our hearts so that our worship services truly are love feasts of the Kingdom of God. Only thus do we avoid becoming part of that *den of thieves* (Lk 19:46). Saint John Chrysostom advises us to “love . . . then let us plant in our own souls, that we may stand with all the saints. For they all pleased God by their love for their neighbor” (Homily 4 on First Thessalonians, *NPNF* First Series, vol. 13, p. 342).

If we allow Christ’s love to transform us, our Eucharistic gatherings will see us “standing in the presence of Christ, and like Moses before God . . . covered with His glory” (Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, p. 30). Then we will joyfully exclaim, “Christ is among us: He is and He shall ever be!” Let there never be a secret thought in our hearts that would shut out or effectively destroy the words of the Lord (cf. vs. 47).

The second way to keep the thieves of materialism from turning the living Temple of God into a profitable program or a successful earthly institution is “for all the people [to be] very attentive to hear [Christ our God]” (vs. 48). It is no accident that we are often called to “be attentive” during the Divine Liturgy. According to Saint Gregory of Nyssa, the human mind, “as long as its current spreads itself in all directions over the pleasures of the sense, has no power that is worth the naming of making its way toward the Real Good; but once call it back and collect it upon itself, so that it may begin to move without scattering and wandering toward the activity which is congenial and natural to it, it will find no obstacle in mounting to higher things, and in grasping realities” (“On Virginity” 7, *NPNF* Second Series, vol. 5, p. 352).

Finally, lest we fall into delusion as a den for thieves, let us pray that Christ our God will come and *drive out* (vs. 45) every inclination to embrace the world’s offers of quick success and growth through promotional programs. Rather, let us sing: “Come let us worship and fall down before Christ. O Son of God, who art risen from the dead, save us who sing unto Thee!” (Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom).

*O Lord, cleanse us by Thy cords of light and truth, driving out all base loves and making the glories of the blameless life and a worship in spirit and in truth to shine forth in us.* – Based on Saint Cyril of Alexandria’s Homily 132 on Luke

**November 29 - Wednesday of the Twenty-eighth Week after Pentecost**  
**Luke 20:1-8**

**Rights vs. Repentance: Luke 20:1-8, especially vss. 5-6:** “*And they reasoned among themselves, saying, ‘If we say, ‘From heaven,’ He will say, ‘Why then did you not believe him?’ But if we say, ‘From men,’ all the people will stone us, for they are persuaded that John was a prophet.’*” The Evangelist Mark concisely records two imperatives given to us by the Lord Jesus: “Repent, and believe in the gospel” (Mk 1:15). This call arouses the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders, who ask: “By what authority are You doing these things? Or who is he who gave You this authority?” (Lk 20:2).

These leaders know very well that *they* are the authorities, for they belong to the ruling council (Nm 11:16-17). Now, they see a Galilean peasant speaking on God’s behalf in the Temple (Lk 19:47), apparently on His own authority.

The Lord does not attempt to convince these leaders of His divine anointing as Messiah, which would provide grounds for an authority beyond question. Rather, He returns to His basic message of repentance and obedience to the Gospel by posing a question to His interrogators: “The baptism of John – was it from heaven or from men?” (vs. 20:4).

Saint John called all men to repent, then to confirm their repentance by the cleansing of baptism. The Lord Jesus’ question – was John’s authority from God, from himself, or from some other human authority? – can only be answered within the heart, for the response will reveal either our openness or our resistance to repentance.

Christ seeks to open the hearts of His interrogators (and all of us) to the repentance preached by Saint John and Himself. God’s appointed leaders have the opportunity to acknowledge the Baptist as a prophet and heed his call to repent, but they balk at even this elementary step toward salvation. Because they will not repent, neither can they hear Christ’s gospel nor believe in Him.

Instead, the authorities create a false polarization between rights and repentance. Woe to us if we become so preoccupied with rights and self-esteem that we are not open to God’s call to “repent and believe in the gospel” (Mk 1:15)! The call to repent is the call to life, for it comes from Life Himself. There is no conflict in calling others to repent so long as the appeal originates with God, who speaks through John and dwells incarnate in the Lord Jesus.

The reasoning of the authorities exposes their uncertainty concerning John (Lk 20:5-6) and their unwillingness to believe that he spoke for God. If they cannot acknowledge John’s call as valid, how can they answer Jesus?

Each of us, however, must answer the Lord’s question. Saint Peter of Damascus exhorts us to respond affirmatively, for “it is always possible to make a new start by means of repentance. ‘You fell,’ it is written, ‘now arise’ (see Prv 24:16). And if you fall again, then rise again, without despairing at all of your salvation, no matter what happens” (*Philokalia* vol. 3, p. 170). As long as we breathe air in this life we have the chance to renew our baptism into Christ through repentance, for our tears become the new cleansing waters.

Repentance remains an urgent concern for us, for without repentance no one can be saved. Do not delay, insists Saint Peter. “Repentance is the first healing medicine. The heart has to repent and come to its natural condition. If a life of sin has led it to an unnatural state, a life of repentance will bring it back to its right state, will give it life” (Vlachos, *Orthodox Psychotherapy*, p. 177).

The Orthodox Christian life is aptly described as one of repentance. “To ascend spiritually, it is necessary first of all to free oneself from the weight of sin,” says Saint John of San Francisco. “It is taken from us through repentance, provided that we banish from ourselves all enmity and forgive” (Perekrestov, *Man of God*, p. 129).

*Pardon and forgive our transgressions, O merciful Savior, and grant that we may complete the remaining time of our life in peace and repentance.* – Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom

**November 30 - St John 1:35-51 (11/30-12/13)**

**The Feast of the Holy Apostle Andrew the First-Called**

**Promising Catechumens: *Saint John 1:35-51, especially vs. 50:*** “...*You will see greater things than these.*” In His parable of the Sower, the Lord Jesus teaches that some who confess Him fall ‘by the wayside’ and are ‘trampled down’ and ‘devoured,’ while some spring up only to wither away, lacking ‘moisture,’ while others are ‘choked’ by the lies, cares or the riches of this age (see Lk. 8:5-7). The parable concludes on the hopeful note that “...others fell on good ground, sprang up, and yielded a crop a hundredfold” (Lk. 8:8). Be encouraged! Many have grown into fruitful disciples of the Lord. Learn from Andrew, Peter, John, Philip, and Nathanael.

What sort of persons grow in Christ and bring forth fruit ‘a hundredfold?’ Today’s Gospel describes the earliest contacts between the Lord and those who became His Apostles. The careful reader of this passage will find seven indications of promise in these first disciples: 1) they were motivated when they heard the Truth repeated; 2) they would not let their ego needs get in the way of knowing the Truth; 3) they yearned for God from the heart; 4) they shared their discovery of the Lord with others; 5) they acted on the Lord’s teaching; 6) they weighed what others told them about God; and 7) they confessed Christ when He confronted them directly.

*There is promise in those who are aroused by the hearing of the Truth.* Twice the Forerunner indicated Jesus as ‘the Lamb of God’ (Jn. 1:29, 36). At John’s repetition, two of his disciples turned to Christ (vs. 37). As Saint John Chrysostom notes, because John repeated “...the same words again, as if softening by tillage some hard and stubborn soil, and by his word as by a plow, disturbing the mind which had hardened into clods, so as to put in the seed deep.”

*There is promise in those who have greater concern for the Lord than for their own ego needs.* The Holy Fathers understood the unnamed disciple to be the writer of the Gospel himself (vss. 37,40). Hence, Saint John Chrysostom asks, “Wherefore then has he not made known the name of the other also? Some say, because it was the writer himself;” and later he prompts us: “Observe too his modesty; he mentions not his own name, but ‘whom He loved’” (Jn. 13:23). This pattern of self-effacement runs throughout John’s Gospel (Jn. 1:37,40; 19:26; 21:20).

*There is promise in a person who searches and yearns for God from the heart.* It is wondrous how quickly and decisively Jesus’ disciples turned to Him. Saint Ephrem the Syrian says of them: “the elect were thirsting after news of Him. These were His instruments, just as He had said, ‘You were chosen by Me before the world’ (Jn. 15:16,19).”

*There is promise in those who share their discovery of the Lord with others.* Saint John Chrysostom says of Saint Andrew: he “kept not the treasure to himself, but hastens and runs quickly to his brother, to impart to him of the good things which he had received” (Jn. 1:41).

*There is promise in a disciple who applies what the Lord teaches and commands.* The great Archbishop said, “Philip not having learned anything from any but Christ, Who said to him only this, ‘Follow Me,’ straightway obeyed, and went not back, but even became a preacher.”

*There is promise when a new Christian weighs what he learns concerning the Lord* (e.g. vs. 46). Nathanael weighed Philip’s claim (vs. 45) against the teaching of the Prophets. As Saint John observed: “For he thought...that Philip was probably mistaken about the place.”

*There is promise for anyone who readily confesses the Lord because Christ has confronted him directly.* Again, hear Saint John regarding Nathanael’s confession: “When he had received an unquestionable proof of His foreknowledge, he hastened to confess Him.”

*Look down, O Lord in mercy upon all who are seeking Thee from their hearts, and number them with Thy chosen flock, that together we may glorify Thee unto the ages of ages.*

**December 1 - Friday of the Twenty-eighth Week after Pentecost**  
**Luke 20:19–26**

**War and Peace: Luke 20:19-26, especially vss. 19-20:** “*And the chief priests and the scribes that very hour sought to lay hands on Him. . . . So they watched Him, and sent spies who pretended to be righteous, that they might seize on His words, in order to deliver Him to the power and the authority of the governor.*” Our great God and Savior Jesus Christ took on human flesh in order to free the inhabitants of the earth from mankind’s ancient enemy, abolish death, and destroy sin. Yet, ironically, His incarnation ignited a violent spiritual war. Let us reflect on that wondrous time when our Lord, the God of Peace, waged war against our spiritual enemy and, through His Cross and Passion, established peace for us.

Who is the enemy in today’s lesson? At first glance it appears to be the chief priests, the scribes, and their spies (vss. 19-20). While the Lord is still in Galilee the scribes and Pharisees “begin to assail Him vehemently,” cross-examining Him and “lying in wait for Him, and seeking to catch Him in something He might say, that they might accuse Him” (vs. 11:53-54). By the time the Lord arrives in Jerusalem, these men are His open opponents. Christ prophesies, “The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed” (vs. 9:22).

Opposition to Christ’s message appears very early in the Gospel (Mk 3:2, 6) and continues throughout His ministry. Now, opportunity presents itself to His opponents at last. One of the Lord’s disciples, Judas Iscariot, goes “his way and conferred with the chief priests and captains, how he might betray Him to them,” even as they “sought how they might kill Him” (Lk 22:4, 2).

All of these men may be considered His visible enemies, but let us consider the true enemy who lurks behind the scenes. As the chief priests are plotting, “Satan entered Judas, surnamed Iscariot” (vs. 3). This verse changes our perspective on the war for eternal life and points to the underlying reality. Yes, the spies, captains, scribes, Pharisees, chief priests, and a traitor from Christ’s inner circle merge to form a cadre of opposition. However, they are mere enlistees – pawns of the real enemy, Satan.

In fact, the Lord prays for these very men from the Cross, saying, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (vs. 23:34). Surely He is not praying for the demons! Saint Nikolai of Zicha explains that these men “were not only doing their own will but the will of another. ‘Many dogs’ (Ps 21:16) were gathered to destroy Christ the Lord. When the devil failed to overcome the Lord on the Mount of Temptation with his false promises (Lk 4:1-13), he applied his wiles and strength to destroying the Lord through men by a dishonorable death on the Cross.” However, Saint Nikolai refuses to apply the term *many dogs* to the men involved, for “David would not have called God’s people, the crown of His creation, dogs, but he called the demons dogs” (*Prologue From Ochrid* vol. 4, p. 47).

Satan and his minions are the true enemies of Christ our God – and our true enemies as well. These powers set out to kill the Life-giver, but the Lord defeats them by the Cross. Through Christ all men, at all times and everywhere, can become victors in God’s war to free the inhabitants of the earth from the tyranny of the enemy. Let us never cease to pray for the men and women who are being used by Satan to oppose the Gospel of peace on earth, for “God has called us to peace” (1 Cor 7:15).

*May the God of peace crush Satan under your feet quickly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.* – Romans 16:20

**December 2 - Saturday of the Twenty-eighth Week after Pentecost**  
**Luke 12:32-40**

**Ready Alert: Luke 12:32-40, especially vs. 40:** “Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.” It is one thing to become an Orthodox Christian; it is another to live as a responsive servant of Christ at all times and under every circumstance. To do so means being on “ready alert,” to borrow a term from the military, emergency teams, and the utility companies. Terms such as *on call*, *available*, *responsive*, and *prepared* characterize such a manner of living. Ask anyone who has served guard duty under combat conditions, or a worker in an emergency room, or a utility repairman coping with a major storm.

Because most of us are not sufficiently aware of the actual conditions prevailing in the spiritual dimension of this life, we behave like inexperienced children – we are liable to paralysis by fear, over-dependence on familiar resources, and an inattentiveness to heart matters. For this reason Christ our Lord provides instruction and encouragement to awaken us and bring us to a higher state of alert. We hear these words in every Divine Liturgy: “Let us attend!”

The Lord Jesus begins with fear, encouraging us not to lose heart. God the Father keeps His promises. In fact, our Lord asserts that it is the Father’s capable, able, and good pleasure to bring about the Kingdom of God, to assert His reign over all facets of the entire creation. God is concerned with every matter and action, even those we cannot see physically.

However, fear, once unloosed and accepted, can either paralyze us or stampede us to great harm. In every situation where surprise or boredom dominates, Christ encourages us to trust God’s promises such as eternal life (1 Jn 2:25), rejoicing (Ps 29:5), comfort in trials (Is 43:2), providence (Rom 8:28), grace to face whatever comes (2 Cor 12:9), and much, much more. Let our first response to any hint of fear be confession and a declaration of our trust in God. It is a matter of fighting back against the weakening within ourselves by choosing to trust in the Lord, despite whatever we may feel.

A likely occasion for fear is physical loss and a shortfall of material resources, for we tend to be oriented toward the physical realm rather than the spiritual. Hence, it is necessary to declare that we are merely the stewards of what is in our hands and under our control. All earthly things are the Lord’s, not ours. An excellent approach to putting material things in their place is to tithe ten percent of our income – and then to go beyond that by making regular offerings for those in need. The Lord Jesus frequently directs us to give alms and to apply the standards of the Kingdom to the handling of our finances. We must remember that “where [our] treasure is, there [our] heart will be also” (Lk 12:34). Above all, we are to value what God values: the condition of our hearts, the quality of our motives, and our capacity to love.

Throughout this Gospel passage, Christ sets watchfulness before us. We are to wait and look for Him, ready to respond to whatever God allows to come in life. First and foremost, we should respond in ways that are pleasing to Him: “Let your waist be girded and your lamps burning; and you yourselves be like men who wait for their master” (vss. 35-36).

Note that watchfulness moves in two directions simultaneously: a readiness to please God is coupled with the inclination to resist suggestions from the enemy (vs. 39). Our foe has his devices! He makes suggestions constantly. Never doubt that the wolf of souls is planning a trap for us every day, in every step along the way. Nevertheless we have hope, for “the Son of Man is coming” (vs. 40). Since we know not when, let us strive to be alert at all times!

*In the night I rise up early beseeching Thee, O Lover of mankind. Lighten me and guide me to Thy commandments. Teach me, O Savior, to do Thy will.* – Canon of Meatfare Sunday