

September 1 – Indiction of the Ecclesiastical New Year (10th Sunday After Pentecost)
1 Timothy 2:1-7

Prayer and Time: 1 Timothy 2:1-7, especially vs. 3, 4: “...God our Savior...desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” Many in the West take for granted that the civil year begins January First, but it is less well known that September First is the beginning of the Orthodox Church year. The First Ecumenical Council held at Nicaea in AD 325 agreed on that date for a number of reasons: September First makes a suitable beginning for the Church’s yearly cycle of prayer in northern latitudes where September often is a month of harvest. The Gospel records that it was during this time of year, at the Synagogue in Nazareth, that the Lord Jesus read this: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor” (Lk 4:18 and see Is 61:1), signaling the start of His ministry.

Historically, September has another significance for Christians: during this month, Constantine the Great defeated his rival Maxentius and proceeded to grant Christians freedom of worship throughout the Roman Empire. For centuries, remembering this day, the Church offered special prayers of supplication immediately before the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy - prayers for the Church and for all cities and the countryside throughout the world. The service provides a tangible way to obey the Apostolic injunction of Saint Paul found in today’s reading: “I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men” (1 Ti 2:1). This practice need not to be limited to a once-a-year service, but should be a daily habit.

When Saint Paul directs us to pray for all men, he specifies both “supplications and intercessions” (vs 1); yet, note, there is no essential difference between these types of petitions, for both are “prayers,” and both are offered for others in need. Still, considering mankind’s physical, emotional, and spiritual requirements, the range of possible human problems is vast. Hence there is good reason to offer regular intercessions. The Apostle does not limit us, but urges that we pray for whatever needs and afflictions currently are befalling our fellow men.

And note: Saint Paul exhorts us to pray for “all men” (vs 1), and not for Christians only; the directive is inclusive. Hence, as we pray, may we beseech God in particular for rulers (vs 2). Why? So that the People of God may live under conditions that promote a peaceful and quiet life for growth in all godliness. Further, we are to pray for strength to conduct ourselves before the world in a God-pleasing manner (vss. 2,3); when the Faith is lived in purity, holiness, and joy others are encouraged to “come to a knowledge of the truth,” and to “be saved” (vs 4).

Finally, the Apostle admonishes us not to confine our prayers merely to ‘asking.’ Instead, he exhorts that prayers be offered “eucharistically,” or (as translated here) by the “giving of thanks” (vs 1). No doubt the reference is an allusion to the regular prayers of praise and thanksgiving on behalf of all humanity that are included in the Divine Liturgy.

In the Liturgy of Saint Basil, the prayer of the Anaphora makes clear that every single person is presented to our God and “Master Who lovest mankind,” to the One Who hast fashioned us “from the dust of the earth and...honored [us] with [His] own image,” even when we disobeyed and were “led astray by the guile of the serpent and rendered subject to death.”

The entire drama of human redemption is offered in prayers such as these, revealing the Church’s yearning for the restoration of all by the Lord Jesus, the “express Image” of the “Person” of God the Father. The constant offering day after day, year after year, and through all time of this kind of eucharistic thanksgiving to God supports the faithful in living before all that many may be drawn to the Faith “to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (vs 4).

O God, enable us to live and pray so that all men will be drawn to the path of salvation.

September 2 – Monday of the Eleventh Week after Pentecost
2 Corinthians 2:3-16

Pastoral Reflections – Penitential Discipline: 2 Corinthians 2:3-16, especially vs. 6: “*This punishment which was inflicted by the majority is sufficient. . .*” In his book *Confession*, Metropolitan Anthony Khrapovitsky observes that “three-quarters of our contemporaries coming to confession are liable not just to strict penances, but to complete deprivation of communion for ten or twenty years, or even till the hour of death.” However, he quickly explains that the penances prescribed by the Church at the Ecumenical Councils are not meant to be applied strictly or by the letter, for “in this same Canon Law it is explained under what conditions [such] excommunication can be shortened” (p. 104).

In today’s passage, the Apostle Paul discusses the restoration of a penitent in Corinth to communion with the Church. In so doing he affirms that we should always come to confession without fear of undue punishment. He emphasizes the importance of forgiveness and comfort, “lest perhaps [we] be swallowed up with too much sorrow” (vs. 7).

Whether our priest responds to our self-examination and penitential confession with absolution, or whether he assigns us a penance and temporarily separates us from communion, his aim is the same: to evoke sorrow (vs. 7), to produce a correction of life and heal relationships (vss. 5-8), and to integrate us once again into Christ’s mystical Body (vss. 8-10).

Our pastors correct us so that what is “inflicted . . . is sufficient for” us (vs. 6), but never conducive of “too much sorrow” (vs. 7). The goal is to help us defeat Satan lest he “should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices” (vs. 11).

We find further riches in this passage to encourage us. First, we understand that the priests hear our confessions with “much affliction and anguish of heart” (vs. 4), for they truly love and care for us. Saint John Chrysostom perceives the depth of Saint Paul’s own pastoral heart when he asks, “What is more tenderly affectioned than this man’s spirit? for he showeth himself to have been not less pained than they who had sinned, but even much more” (“Homily 4 on Second Corinthians,” *NPNF First Series*, Vol. 12, p. 294).

Our good pastors guide their flocks in love, and they hurt for us when we stray. In confession, the priest “[leaves] the ninety-nine and [goes] to the mountains to seek the one that is straying” (Mt 18:12). As a good shepherd of the flock who follows his Master, the true pastor also “brings out his own sheep and goes before them” (Jn 10:4).

Such pastoral affection should naturally fill us and every member of Christ’s flock, establishing an ethos of mutual forgiveness, comfort, and support within our churches for those who are struggling to find healing. We are never alone in our battles with sin and death, nor should we abandon others in their struggles.

For this reason Saint Paul accepts “the punishment which was inflicted by the majority” as sufficient (2 Cor 2:6). He urges the Corinthians “to forgive and comfort” the penitent member of their congregation and to “reaffirm your love to him” (vss. 7-8). Penitential discipline relies on the anchor of evangelical desire within the context of God’s love for the whole world. God labors with us (Jn 3:16)!

Satan may have his devices (2 Cor 2:11), but “thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place” (vs. 14). May the sweet aroma of Christ be in us and in turn touch others, so that the Orthodox Church becomes “the fragrance of Christ” among “the saved and . . . those who are perishing” (vs. 15).

O Lord, grant us deliverance from Satan, true penitence, and forgiveness for all.

September 3 – Tuesday of the Eleventh Week after Pentecost
2 Corinthians 2:14-3:3

Pastoral Reflections – The Pastoral Relationship: 2 Corinthians 2:14-3:3, especially vss. 3:1-2: *“Or do we need . . . epistles of commendation to you or letters of commendation from you? You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men.”* Those who actively participate in the life of the Church know that the character of the interactions between pastors and their congregations varies greatly. In this present reading, the Apostle Paul reflects on his pastoral life with the church in Corinth and provides an invaluable teaching concerning the basis of pastoral ministry, the different ways we experience the relationship between priests and congregations, and what lends authority to a pastor.

Saint Paul first gives thanks “to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ” (vs. 14). The priest’s leadership of his congregation always draws upon the authority of the risen Christ. As the Apostle Peter writes to a group of congregations, “You were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls” (1 Pt 2:25).

Our bishops appoint pastors to our congregations in order to promote the advancement of Christ’s victory for His people. At a given time, for a given congregation, the bishop selects the man he believes to be capable of leading the people to share in the Lord’s ministry. Many factors may influence the bishop’s choice, but in the final analysis he desires is to see the pastor and his congregation experience the Lord’s victory in their life together within a specific locale.

When a pastor assumes his post in a parish, some will experience his ministry as a blessing while others will not. Saint Paul alludes to these diverse reactions with an analogy to the fragrance of incense: some members find a pastor’s ministry to have an enhancing fragrance, while others find his ministry akin to an unpleasant aroma (vss. 15-16). For the apostle, such reactions go beyond mere like and dislike. A pastor’s presence and work gives off the aroma of death for some, while for others the same ministry works as an aroma that leads them deeper into true life in Christ (vs. 16). Perhaps we may think that these diverse reactions follow the lines separating those in the Church from those still outside, in the world. However, our pastoral experience can seldom be divided so neatly. Some pastors fail, abuse, or even betray their people – and congregations may likewise fail, abuse, and betray their priests.

All of this is a sad testimony to the reality of sin. As the apostle has already affirmed, Satan has “his devices” (vs. 11). By opposing a particular priest, we may actually be disclosing our captivity to death. Whenever we find ourselves taking a stand against our pastor, we must be careful to examine ourselves and our motives. Likewise, opposition or attraction to a particular priest by those outside the Church may have many roots, some of which lead to life and to the discovery of the true Orthodox faith.

Where, then, does a pastor’s authority ultimately reside? A priest never serves without an appointment from his bishop, who is the true shepherd of every community in his diocese. However, the Apostle Paul directs us to another reality that exists alongside proper church order.

In the end, the power and authority of the pastoral relationship comes from the Holy Spirit. It is the movement of the Spirit in the heart of the bishop and priest which constitutes “an epistle of Christ” (vs. 3:3) – a spiritual letter to the parish. When these “letters” are accepted by all parties in a pastoral relationship, the resulting combination can be easily “read by all men” (vs. 2).

O Lord, fill Thy pastors with the gift of the Holy Spirit that they may worthily stand in innocence before Thine altar to proclaim the gospel of Thy kingdom and the word of true life. – Prayer for the Ordination of a Priest

September 4 - Wednesday of the Eleventh Week after Pentecost
2 Corinthians 3:4-11

Pastoral Reflections, continued – Pastoral Authority: 2 Corinthians 3:4-11, especially vs. 8: “How will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious?” Saint John Chrysostom, a famed priest and archbishop of the Church, uses a maritime analogy to express doubts about his adequacy as a pastor. He writes, “If anyone in charge of a full-sized merchant ship, full of rowers, and laden with a costly freight, were to station me at the helm and bid me cross the Aegean or the Tyrrhene seas, I should recoil from the proposal at once.

“I know my own soul, how feeble and puny it is,” he continues. “I know the magnitude of this ministry, and the great difficulty of the work: for more stormy billows vex the soul of the priest than the gales which disturb the sea” (“Treatise On the Priesthood” 3.7-8, *NPNF* First Series, Vol. 9, p. 49).

The saint’s assessment of priestly ministry is an apt one. Indeed, who among us is actually worthy of the sacred ministry of God? What grounds can any man have for asking to be ordained to the priesthood?

In today’s passage, the Apostle Paul addresses the ministerial calling of all Christians. Frail as we are, each one of us shares in the ministry of the Church – ordained clergy and laity alike. Yet none of us is equal to ministry in the Body of Christ.

And yet Saint Paul is confident in his authority as an apostle (vs. 4). He is neither “peddling the word of God” (vs. 2:17), nor seeking written “epistles of commendation” (vs. 3:1). As he points out to the Corinthians, “You are our epistle . . . written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God” (vss. 2-3). What is the source of his confidence? It comes “through Christ toward God” (vs. 4), for Christ confronted him on the road to Damascus, humbled him in repentance, and made him His apostle (see Acts 9:3-15).

When we first united ourselves to Christ, we placed our trust in Him. Every time we extend love to the undeserving, or speak out against fraud and injustice, or refuse to lie, cheat, and indulge our cravings, we are once again trusting in Christ. In these actions we participate in the pastoral work of Christ, with the full authority of God. Such is our powerful, albeit humble, position!

Despite having received his credentials for ministry directly from the Lord, the Apostle Paul remains modest in his claims: “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves” (2 Cor 3:5). He views himself as a mere recipient of the powers of an apostle. Even later, after describing his amazing achievements (vss. 11:22-12:4), he continues to maintain that “of myself I will not boast, except in my infirmities” (vs. 12:5).

Saint Paul functions as an apostle with the full understanding that “our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant” (vs. 3:5). How is he *sufficient* except by the power of the Spirit, for “the Spirit gives life” (vs. 6)?

Our faith is challenged whenever we are called upon to stand up for the gospel. And yet we may modestly anticipate that God will make us sufficient through the indwelling presence and action of the life-giving Holy Spirit.

Saint Paul is confident because he knows his efforts “in Christ” will last. He states, “If the ministry . . . written and engraved on stones was glorious . . . how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious?” (vss. 7-8). Indeed, nothing compares to the authority conveyed by the Lord Jesus Christ, or to the power of the Holy Spirit. All ancient ministries are superseded (vss. 9-10). The Christian faith “is much more glorious” (vs. 11), for it endures unto eternity. Let the gift we have received make us confident before God with every person we meet.

It is right to worship Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the Trinity one in essence. – Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom

September 5 – Thursday of the Eleventh Week after Pentecost
2 Corinthians 4:1-12

Pastoral Reflections, continued – Obstacles and Temptations: 2 Corinthians 4:1-12, especially vs. 1: *“Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart.”* Early in his second letter to the Corinthians, Saint Paul declares that the “sufficiency” of his ministry comes “through Christ toward God,” by the Spirit who “gives life” (vss. 3:4, 6). He stresses that this ministry is the heritage of every member of the Church, since “all . . . are being transformed . . . by the Spirit of the Lord” (vs. 3:18). Indeed, we know that Christ is seeking to “make [us] complete in every good work to do His will, working in [us] what is well pleasing in His sight” (Heb 13:21).

In the opening verse of the today’s passage, Saint Paul reveals how the mercy we receive from God is meant to encourage us to ministry on behalf others (2 Cor 4:1). If this was true in the first century, it still applies to us today. We are meant to share in the work of Christ the Shepherd, exercising our membership in the Lord.

We pray that Christ will reveal to us the needs of others as He sees them. Just as God loves us, although we are sinners, He loves everyone. He calls us to love as He does! Let us heed Christ’s mandate and pray for the Lord to show us how to extend His love by offering mercy to others. Only then will His ministry begin to take root in us.

Strive to love others! God can ignite our love for the unlovable, showing us how to extend care to the hateful, to give even when we are being used, and to go that extra mile (see Mt 5:41). Such love may seem impossible to our fleshly mind, but God mercifully equips us to extend Christ’s ministry without wavering or becoming discouraged by abuses we encounter.

The greatest obstacle to sharing Christ’s pastoral care is the temptation to serve only ourselves. We may give in to weariness, or simply become indifferent to others. However, the Lord Himself calls us to this struggle! We determine, like Saint Paul, to say that “we do not lose heart” (2 Cor 4:1). Next, we recall that the mercy we have received is a gift enabling us to renounce “the hidden things of shame” (vs. 2). As we mature in faith, we rely on the grace of the sacrament of confession, striving to grow in the virtues of the age to come. We need regular confession as we struggle in our life in Christ.

When the Apostle Paul received God’s mercy, he walked no more “in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending [himself] to every man’s conscience in the sight of God” (vs. 2). Let us pray for the grace to express what Christ desires in and from us.

Indeed, we will be tempted to fall back into sinful ways, “as when a dog returns to his own vomit, and becomes despicable” (Prv 26:11). We may become mentally preoccupied by the sins that imprisoned us in the past. This mental process is partly involuntary, since former sins tend to cling, so we must take care that we oppose the lure of those sins we have formerly confessed. If we keep going over our past sins, it will surely divert us from giving to and caring for others. Another obstacle to our fulfillment of Christ’s ministry is the spiritual blindness of others, for the “god of this age has blinded” many minds and hearts (2 Cor 4:4). Let us strive to commend ourselves “to every man’s conscience in the sight of God” (vs. 2), working with the Holy Spirit to drive out the darkness in ourselves. For God our Father “commanded light to shine out of darkness . . . in the face of Jesus Christ” (vs. 6) and works miracles in us.

O Christ, true light of all, shine within me, a poor earthen vessel, that all may know Thee.

September 6 - Friday of the Eleventh Week after Pentecost
2 Corinthians 4:13-18

Renewal: 2 Corinthians 4:13-18, especially vss. 16-17: *“The inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”* Who or what renews our “inward man”? Surely the answer is God, who saves those who willingly bear their “light affliction.” Although the central role of these two verses may not be obvious at first reading (especially when Saint Paul’s prefatory remarks in verses 7-12 are reviewed), they stand at the heart of today’s passage and provide the context for the apostle’s meaning.

Take note of Saint Paul’s scriptural reference at the beginning of today’s passage. When he speaks of “what is written” – “I believed and therefore I spoke” – in verse 13, he is quoting from Psalm 115:1 (which corresponds to Psalm 116:10, in some translations). This related passage sheds light on the mind of the apostle throughout today’s verses.

Saint Paul addresses the Corinthians as a suffering man who is facing death – “always [being] delivered to death for Jesus’ sake” (2 Cor 4:11). This description is not hyperbole. The apostle is crying out to God in the same manner as the author of the Psalms: “The pangs of death have encompassed me, the perils of hades have found me . . . and I called upon the name of the Lord” (Ps 114:3-4).

However, God “hath delivered my soul from death. . . . I believed, wherefore I spake” (Ps 114:8; 115:1). Moved by the same Holy Spirit as the Psalmist David, Saint Paul is undergoing a similar deep suffering.

And truly, we as God’s people suffer. A child may die in infancy. Our life’s work may end abruptly. We receive a cancer diagnosis, or perhaps the pains of age find us. We may be wrenched by marital struggles or infidelity. Those in military service endure loss of limb, or worse. Each crisis is followed by further difficulties, for we are no different than others who live in this vale of tears. However, by the grace of God, we may meet life’s exigencies and embrace them in the “spirit of faith” since “we also believe . . . that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus” (2 Cor 4:13-14).

The Apostle Paul declares, “Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day” (vs. 16). This process of *renewal* continues unabated inside us, because we are united to Christ. Even in our worn and sinful hearts can undergo wonderful, renewing change.

However, we must cooperate with the Holy Spirit. We must stop looking “at the things which are seen, but [rather look steadily] at the things which are not seen” (vs. 18). Then our “light affliction, which is but for a moment” (vs. 17) may actually work to our secret advantage, achieving “a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (vs. 17).

This process by which “the inward man is being renewed day by day” (vs. 16) is the essence of our life in Christ.” Yes, we find that living in this spiritual manner requires a demanding balancing act. We are asked to trust God, even as we struggle with temptations and assaults from every side. Our inner man, according to Saint John Chrysostom, is renewed “by faith, by hope, by a forward will, and thus, by braving extremities. For . . . as the body suffers ten thousand things, in the like proportion hath the soul goodlier hopes and becometh brighter, like gold refined in the fire more and more” (“Homily 9 on Second Corinthians,” *NPNF First Series*, Vol. 12, p. 322).

Yea, Lord, I pray Thee, have pity on me. Spare me in mine affliction and my misery and hide not the way of salvation from me. – Archimandrite Sophrony Sakharov

September 7 - Saturday of the Eleventh Week after Pentecost
1 Corinthians 1:3-9

The Fulfilling of Wisdom: 1 Corinthians 1:3-9, especially vs. 9: “*God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*” In the first of the prayers the Church assigns us to read after we receive holy communion, we thank God for not rejecting us, but rather accounting us worthy to be communicants of Christ’s holy Mysteries. We then ask that divine wisdom fill our lives as a result of receiving Christ’s holy Body and precious Blood.

As this prayer continues, we ask the Lord to heal our souls and bodies and to enlighten the eyes of our hearts; we ask for peace, faith invincible, and sincere love. We seek perfect obedience in our struggle to keep God’s commandments so that we grow in the grace which He has bestowed upon us; so that our life’s journey may be preserved in holiness and confident hope; and so that we may attain the heavenly kingdom in the age to come.

This series of requests in the first post-communion prayer directly parallel today’s passage from First Corinthians. It takes the form of a prayer offered by Saint Paul to God in thanksgiving for the disciples at Corinth. Since we are also Christ’s disciples, the apostle’s prayer applies to us as well. Every prayer of thanksgiving responds to the acts of God and flows from His gifts. Saint Paul notes how God the Father has bestowed grace and peace upon us, enriching our speech and knowledge through Christ our God and confirming his testimony concerning the coming of Christ among the faithful (vss. 4-6). Surely we are deprived of “no gift” (vs. 7), because God remains faithful and ready to help us at every turning point in life.

What about us? How do we respond to all that God has done on our behalf? We praise His wondrous, saving works at every Divine Liturgy: how He endured “the cross, the grave, the third day resurrection,” followed by “the ascension into heaven, the sitting at the right hand, and the second and glorious coming.”

The gospel has been opened before us many times. We are welcome to utilize the words and phrases of Saint Paul’s prayer for ourselves (and even borrow liberally from other scripture, hymns, and prayers) so that we, too, may glorify God for His wonders!

Still, we must constantly ask ourselves if we are continuing to grow in the knowledge of our faith (vs. 5). Have we meditated, read, thought, reflected, prayed, and learned about all that “Jesus began both to do and to teach” (Acts 1:1)? Do we speak of these marvelous things and live out our witness before our friends, acquaintances, and family? All too often, there is something that holds us back. What does the apostle mean when he says that “the testimony of Christ was confirmed in . . . you,” and that he anticipates God “will also confirm you to the end” (vss. 6, 8)? Surely we said “yes” to God and were *confirmed* at our baptism and chrismation. We delight in worshiping Him. We listen to sermons and nod in agreement, knowing that we are hearing the truth.

We have found ourselves giving love, being kind, helping others, reaching out to the fearful, and choosing to grow in virtue. Let us regard these things with awe, for our actions come from the Holy Spirit, confirming that God’s wisdom is with us. They strengthen us in God’s gift of faithfulness. May we seek never to hold back the truth, for we have “come short in no gift . . . waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ” (vs. 7). Rather, let us strive to be “blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ” (vs. 8), even when we fail in our labors. God has called us “into the fellowship of His Son” (vs. 9) and now fulfills all wisdom in us.

May I ever remember Thy grace, and henceforth live not unto myself, but unto Thee. – Post-communion Prayer

September 8 - Sunday before the Elevation of the Holy Cross (11th Sunday after Pentecost and the Nativity of the Theotokos) - Galatians 6:11-18

Only the Cross: Galatians 6:11-18, especially vs 14: *“But God forbid that I should boast except in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by Whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”* Consider this spiritual experience of Archimandrite Sophrony Sakharov: “And suddenly the Almighty reveals Himself in His indescribable humility. This vision moves the soul, astonishes the mind. Involuntarily, we bow before Him. And however much we try to become like Him in humility, we do not attain to Him.” Behold Him on the Cross, living Truth immersed in death, and receive the love of the Crucified, now risen from the dead. New priorities overtake old values. Embracing Him we may move into “a new creation” (vs 15).

In every century some (perhaps most) settle for the world rather than God’s new creation. Now, in the present passage Saint Paul strives for the hearts of those he had introduced to Christ: he urges them and us to embrace the Cross as a way of life and to “walk according to this rule” (vs 16). Yes, he is speaking to us also, for the temptation to adopt lesser visions and evade God persists. If we pick and choose among the Lord’s words to our liking rather than embracing the Incarnate Word Himself completely, then we choose to walk according to the flesh.

What does a human vision of God look like? Throughout Galatians, Saint Paul speaks of such a lesser vision: “turn again to the weak and beggarly elements” (vs 4:9), “to be under the law” (vs 4:21), to be “entangled...with a yoke of bondage” (vs 5:1), to “attempt to be justified by law” (vs.5:4). Such a diminished vision appeared openly in the Old Covenant, and today still “gives birth to bondage” (vs 4:24). God, however, partially revealed Himself at Mount Sinai - to prepare for the New Covenant “the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (6:14).

Reduce God’s revelation to law and we embrace rules and codes and narrowest of relationships with God, endless struggle with obedience. In a religion of pure obedience, God the Lord is defined as the Law-Giver Who must be obeyed on pain of death (Dt 28:15-68). While this is true of God, we are those sorely diminished. Saint Paul says, “God forbid that I should boast except in the Cross” (Gal 6:14). He does not boast in his law-abiding obedience, scrupulous as that may have been. He boasts in the One on the Cross, God in the flesh, the God-man embracing our most bitter enemy: death. The Law-Giving God is disclosed in indescribable humility, obediently dying - much as we do, although we are disobedient.

Suddenly we move beyond God’s righteous and holy laws to His unrestrained love. The image of pure mercy calls to our hearts. He forgives with a humility beyond imagining. Now we see that the good life is not mere obedience, but affirmation, a “Yes!” to Jesus our Savior and God, a reframing of every thought and act in response to Him. He loves us!

The Cross is no “yoke of bondage,” but “God’s yoke,” which is “easy and...light” (Mt 11:29,30). My battered soul questions such a vision: is there a yoke that is easy and light? Yes, because our Lord Himself labors with us as a yokefellow, pulling with us, for us. Could we ever imagine God born from a human Virgin yoking Himself to us? How poor are those who turn from the Crucified and Risen One to settle solely for obedience to a set of laws!

Enough of seeking after mere obedience! Let us sign on with the Cross and say, “the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (Gal 6:14). Let us bear in our bodies “the marks [the stigmata] of the Lord Jesus” (vs 17). Rejoice: His grace is with and in our poor spirits (vs 18). Let us live in response to being loved by God, even unto death.

O Lord, save Thy People and bless Thine inheritance, granting to Thy People victory over all their enemies, and by the power of Thy Cross preserving Thine Kingdom.

September 9 - Monday of the Twelfth Week after Pentecost
2 Corinthians 5:10-15

Life in Christ – Living for Him: 2 Corinthians 5:10-15, especially vs. 15: “He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.” According to Nicholas Cabasilas, “The life in Christ originates in this life and arises from it. It is perfected, however, in the life to come, when we shall have reached that last day” (*The Life in Christ*, p. 43). Who can better help us understand this life in Christ than His apostles – the men called by the Lord from their fishing nets, from among the crowds He encountered as an itinerant preacher, even from the ranks of the enemies bent on stopping His teaching?

In the final verse of today’s epistle reading, the Apostle Paul commands us to “live . . . for Him” (vs. 15). However, Saint Paul’s command is radically opposed to the everyday expectations we often encounter. We are supposed fit in, be nice, adapt. We are encouraged to enjoy ourselves, to be pleasant, to contribute our “fair share” to society, and generally meet the expectations of our employers, families, friends, and society. In reality, the purveyors of such wisdom are currying a cheap desire for self-satisfaction and self-esteem in us.

The Apostle Paul rejects this approach to living, however, for he urges us to live for Christ as our Lord, God, and Savior. What does it actually mean, to live “for Him who died for [us] and rose again” (vs. 15)? How do we know if in fact we are living for the Lord?

The apostle reveals the true context of this present life (one that is often overlooked, although God-ordained) in the light of our unvarnished destiny: “We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ” (vs. 10). We hear this same message in the Divine Liturgy every time we pray for “a Christian ending to our life . . . and a good defense before the fearful judgment seat of Christ.” We shall answer on that final day for what we make of this life by our choices and actions.

On Cheesefare Sunday, before the start of Lent, we make “remembrance of the Second Appearance of Christ, which shows no favors.” Are we not a little uneasy, knowing how often we slip into self-deception? Let us not act as if we will live forever, indulging in the temptation to “eat, drink and be merry” (Lk 12:19).

We must never overlook the fragility of our mortal existence! We are meant for eternal glory. Let us be humble before God and seek to live today in a manner worthy of the Master.

When we soberly assess our destiny, we can better understand Saint Paul’s words: “Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men” (vs. 11). Knowing that we, too, will be accountable, let us adopt his perspective and embrace this godly terror without cringing. Likewise, Saint Paul calls us to wake up (Eph 5:14) and to stop boasting “in appearance and not in heart” (2 Cor 5:12). Crucial to our effort to “live for Christ” is casting off our concern with appearances – with looking good. That is the way of the world.

We strive, rather, to cleanse our hearts of all impurity so that we might hear the Lord speaking to us in the depth of our being. If we reach out to Christ, recognizing that we are desperate, we shall find the grace to obey.

Some people have observed Saint Paul’s actions and concluded that he was *beside* himself (vs. 13). We know, however, that he heard the Lord and now offers us fair warning.

Having taught us how to live for Christ, the apostle concludes his teaching with the most important component of this life: love. “For the love of Christ compels us” (vs. 14). Truly, natural and genuine love is the measure of authentic Christianity. Such love always indicates the way of our life in Christ.

May I ever remember Thy grace, and live henceforth not unto myself but unto Thee, O Thou who alone canst unbind what has been bound and make the crooked straight. – Post-communion Prayer

September 10 - Tuesday of the Twelfth Week after Pentecost
2 Corinthians 5:15-21

Be Reconciled to God: 2 Corinthians 5:15-21, especially vs. 20: *“We implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God.”* In the icon called “Extreme Humility,” the Lord Jesus’ eyes are closed. He does not look at us in reproach, nor does He command. He is simply present before us, His suffering ended. We hear the echo of His final cry to the Father, “Into Your hands I commit My spirit.” (Lk 23:46). We behold the Peace of God who extends peace to us. The Lord’s arms are crossed in repose, yet He cradles a spear like an infant in His arms. His side has been pierced, He is dead, cradling us in His heart, tenderly and meekly in extreme humility.

Yes, the Lord Jesus is ultimate humility, beyond measure. He stands as the frontier of humility beyond which no child of pride may pass. We may only gaze across this impassable border into the realm of divine humility – a dominion we can neither attain nor comprehend in our strength – yet Jesus our Lord has opened the door for us. He offers His gift to us humbly: “He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him Who died for them and rose again” (2 Cor 5:15).

The Lord’s extreme humility invites us to be reconciled to God, to accept the great and final reconciliation which He completed and fulfilled. What can we add? Nothing. We may only receive what God offers. That is what the Apostle Paul means when he says, “He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him” (vs. 15). Christ’s reconciliation puts an end to all our pretensions, yet still encourages us to receive His humility.

What should we think of God’s offer to restore us to Him? We rejoice, receiving His reconciliation within our hearts. His offers resonates harmonically and finds a melody within us that sings with the angels.

In Christ we behold the purpose that upholds the universe. “What is man, that Thou art mindful of him? Or the son of man, that Thou visitest him?” (Ps 8:4). We rejoice, for the apostle helps us understand the gift we have received from the God of ultimate purpose. He has opened the way for us to be reconciled.

Note how the Apostle Paul even reframes our vision of those around us. “Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh” (2 Cor 5:16), for “if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation” (vs. 17). The saints of the Church have entered deeply into Christ, becoming deified, transformed, and radiant with the uncreated Light. They have received light from Christ and live in beauty.

Sinful men have received Christ and then betrayed Him. Denying their Lord, they have wept with Saint Peter. Some do not yet know the Lord Jesus. They neither see Him nor are capable of seeing Him. Some reject Him and curse.

And yet everyone has the potential to become “a new creation” in which “old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (vs. 17). Therefore, we “regard no one according to the flesh” (vs. 16). Let us cease to looking upon others in judgment, as we have done in the past. As we behold God’s purpose for mankind, we rejoice with Saint Herman of Alaska and vow to love God from this moment, this day, this hour forward. As we take our next breath, we acknowledge that “all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ” (vs. 18).

The Lord does not impute our trespasses to us if we confess our sins to Him, for He “has committed to us the word of reconciliation” (vs. 19). We in turn become “ambassadors for Christ” (vs. 20). With His humility we implore all to “be reconciled to God” (vs. 20).

Illumine Thou me also by the tree of Thy Cross and save me. – Great and Holy Friday

September 11 - Wednesday of the Twelfth Week after Pentecost
2 Corinthians 6:11-16

Open-heartedness: 2 Corinthians 6:11-16, especially vs. 11, 13: “*We have spoken openly to you. . . . Now in return for the same (I speak as to children) you also be open.*” According to Saint John the Evangelist, “If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?” (1 Jn 4:20). Likewise, if a man claims that his heart is open to God, but has closed his heart to his brother, he is a liar.

Following this corollary, Saint Paul appeals to the Corinthians to open their hearts to him. He warns that by restricting their *affections* toward him (vs. 12), they run the risk becoming enmeshed with unbelievers and idols (vss. 15-16). Worst of all, they risk severing their relationship with the living God.

If we wall ourselves off from the apostle’s appeal, we close ourselves off from God. We go back to the darkness of idolatry and the demons. Saint John Chrysostom observes that Saint Paul speaks to us like a father with a wayward son, asking, “What art thou doing, child? Dost thou despise thy father and prefer impure men filled with ten thousand vices? Knowest thou not how much better and more respectable thou art than they?” (“Homily 13 on Second Corinthians,” *NPNF* First Series, Vol. 12, p. 344).

We can imagine how quickly a tiny first-century congregation might be swamped by the dominant culture of paganism if it chose to cut itself off from its father in Christ. For this reason Saint Paul poses five questions to them, and to us, revealing the implications of closing the heart. His questions are pertinent, for if we shut our hearts against our brethren, what remains but a life of crass secularism, heresy, and paganism? Death soon swallows us up!

“For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness?” (vs. 14). “Fellowship” here refers to a community or partnership. Saint Paul’s question reminds us that it is impossible to live in spiritual isolation. Our hearts inevitably are yoked to something or someone.

What alternatives does the world offer? Where can we go? How can we consider throwing over the power of the Resurrection, the inimitable love of God, the way to theosis, and the Church’s heavenly worship, all for the sake of emptiness and triviality?

“And what communion has light with darkness?” (vs. 14). Let us never allow the present-day fascination with Asian religions to hold sway over us. Why would we contemplate abandoning Christ the Lifegiver for the darkness of Eastern religions – or worse, today’s neopaganism? These faiths reject God’s good creation and the promise of redemption from sin.

“And what accord has Christ with Belial?” (vs. 15). No accord can be struck between Christ and paganism in its many forms. Behind all idolatry and heresy stands Belial, a word borrowed from the Hebrew. It suggests worthlessness, perdition, and joining oneself to Satan’s rebellion. Let us pray that we never harden ourselves against the faith, or present ourselves to the devil as a tool of those he would use to destroy mankind.

“Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever?” (vs. 15). Saint Paul begins this passage with the image of being “yoked” (vs. 14). To be united to Christ is to be yoked with love (Mt 11:29). Hardening our hearts against a fellow Christian or the Lord leads us into slavery, and yokes us with those who hate. Yet the first steps down this road may be imperceptible.

“And what agreement has the temple of God with idols?” (vs. 16). We are members of the Temple of the living God. Christ is among us! Let us not sell our birthright for pottage!

Let us love one another, that with one accord we may confess the Trinity, one in Essence. – Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom

September 12 - Thursday of the Twelfth Week after Pentecost
2 Corinthians 7:1-10

Cleanse Ourselves: 2 Corinthians 7:1-10, especially vs. 1: “Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” In speaking of promises, Saint Paul is referring to the series of divine promises he enumerated in 2 Corinthians 6:16-18. In effect, God says, “Be a pure people separated to Me, and I will dwell among you as your Father and God.”

On the basis of these assertions, the apostle urges us to “cleanse ourselves” (vs. 1) so that God will dwell among us. And yet the Prophet Job asks, “For who shall be pure from uncleanness? No one” (Job 14:4). Since we continue in our uncleanness, what is the apostle telling us?

Had not the Lord Jesus borne our sins (Is 52:4-6) and cleansed us in holy baptism (Eph 5:26), God’s declarations might be considered the counsel of despair. However, the apostle’s injunction to “cleanse ourselves” illumines the great hope we have in Christ Jesus, for through His death and Resurrection the Lord provides a means for us to attain purity beyond our capacity. Now, with the aid of the Holy Spirit, we may aspire to that true purity of which Saint Paul speaks, if we follow the process of cleansing outlined in this reading.

The purity that God seeks is primarily moral and spiritual. We are to “cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit” (vs. 1). “Flesh” is the term used for human desires, thoughts, feelings, and actions when they function in detachment from God. Human life apart from the Lord, without fear of the Lord, leads to bitterness and filth in our flesh and spirit.

The apostolic exhortation to live in purity directs us toward an awakened consciousness of our desires, thoughts, and feelings as they precede our actions. If we would be cleansed, then we must find and identify the workings of the flesh within ourselves. Then, aided by the Holy Spirit, we will be able to expel “all filthiness of flesh and spirit.”

Indeed, we have a share in the process of cleansing ourselves. Prayer, fasting, and worship are required of us. According to Saint Gregory Palamas, even when our evil thoughts cease, our soul is not yet pure. To purify our entire inner life, including our heart, requires self-control, love, and vigilance.

Saint Paul calls such cleansing a process of “perfecting holiness” (vs. 1). In the original Greek the word for “perfecting” derives from *telos* and refers to “an end attained.” The Lord uses this word when He says, “You shall be *perfect*, just as your Father in heaven is perfect” (Mt 5:48). Cleansing, then, is a process lived in the fear of God, and its outcome is holiness. The level of purity to be attained is defined by God, rather by our own standards. God’s standards determine what we must expel or retain and develop within us.

Finally, the apostle describes the steps we must follow to reach *telos*, the ultimate God-defined purity. We begin by *opening our hearts* to the teachings of the apostles (vs. 2), which awakens in us an “earnest desire” (vs. 7) to be cleansed. This zealous desire leads us to mourning (vs. 7) and “godly sorrow” (vs. 10), which in turn enables us to examine ourselves, to uncover our personal uncleanness and sin, and to pursue and attain true cleansing.

Followed diligently as a labor of cleansing, these steps naturally lead to repentance and a sacrifice pleasing to God: “a broken spirit, a heart that is broken and humbled” (Ps 50:17). Such a heart God does not despise! Rather, the Lord works for us and within us to “create a clean heart and renew a right spirit within us,” for that is His chief desire.

Have mercy on me, O God, according to Thy great mercy and blot out my transgressions. – Psalm 50:1

September 13 - Friday of the Twelfth Week after Pentecost
2 Corinthians 7:10-16

Sorrow and Repentance: 2 Corinthians 7:10-16, especially vs. 10: *“For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.”* Without repentance, it is impossible for us to enjoy a genuine, healing relationship with the Lord Jesus or to enter into His presence. For this reason we cry out during Great Lent, “Open to me the doors of repentance, O Life-giver.”

The present passage speaks of two types of sorrow, which at first glance we might consider equivalent to repentance (vs. 10). However, Saint Paul asserts that only “godly sorrow” over our sins can heal us. This sorrow differs markedly from what he terms “worldly sorrow.” Elaborating on this contrast, the apostle describes what follows from godly sorrow and actually promotes healing: our obedience to the Lord Jesus. Such obedient sorrow eventually cleanses our hearts, for “godly sorrow produces repentance” (vs. 10). However, we must remember that true godly sorrow is only the beginning of repentance as a life-long work.

Saint Paul has labored with the Corinthian congregation for some time to help its members establish a strong relationship with the Lord. He hopes to see repentance in their lives. And, as we can see in this passage, he now sees signs of progress toward his apostolic goal.

Let us examine the process he recommends to the Corinthians. The key, as indicated above, is the cultivation of “godly sorrow” (vs. 10). Such sorrow produces healing through God’s grace, while the yield of our “worldly sorrow” is self-satisfaction and death. Saint Paul proceeds to distinguish between these types of sorrow, outlining their very different outcomes.

Godly sorrow produces the “diligence” (vs. 11) that allows us to change. Worldly sorrow – despite our tears and regrets – does not lead to deep inner conversion. Godly sorrow clears the soul, never seeking to justify what we have done.

As we labor to cleanse our thoughts, attitudes, and passions of all traces of and desires for sin, our godly sorrow produces *indignation* (vs. 11). As the Spirit of God illumines our sin, we perceive our offenses through God’s eyes. Indignation follows as a healthy, God-given reaction. Being offended at our sins, we naturally seek to confess our faults.

If, however, we savor the pleasure we had in wrong-doing, or if our sin still gives us delight, attracts our eyes, or stirs our emotions, then we must confess again and again until indignation arises in us. Our indignation gives birth to fear of the Lord.

Worldly sorrow, on the other hand, may deplore the consequences of our sin, but it lacks the fear of God. Speaking of his sins of adultery and murder, the Prophet David laments: “Against Thee only have I sinned and done this evil before Thee” (Ps 50:4). Saint Paul perceives this godly fear among the Corinthians upon the arrival of the divinely appointed Apostle Titus (see vs. 15).

Godly sorrow is zealous for *vindication* (vs. 11) – but not the type of vindication that excuses sin! Such vindication is merely another example of worldly sorrow. Godly sorrow makes amends and vindicates truth through action intended to correct the effects of sin.

As true penitents, we seek whenever possible to ask the forgiveness of anyone we have wronged. We strive to reshape our habits and attitudes so as to weed out the preconditions of our sins and eliminate them. Lastly, our godly sorrow is characterized by obedience to mature, spiritual authority. Worldly sorrow masks the pride of trying to figure it out sin on our own, while “Obedience is the tomb of the will and the resurrection of humility” (*Ladder of Divine Ascent* 4.3).

O Lord, who didst take the thief as companion, grant us also the gift of true repentance. – Verse for Great and Holy Thursday

September 14 - Elevation of the Cross 1 Corinthians 1:18-24

Two Fallacies: 1 Corinthians 1:18-24, especially vs. 22: “For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom. . . .” The astronomer Allan Sandage spent a lifetime peering through telescopes into space, studying supernovae. He never ceased to wonder, “Why is there something rather than nothing?” Finally, as he confessed, “My science . . . drove me to the conclusion that the world is much more complicated than can be explained by science. It is only through the supernatural that I can understand the mystery of existence.”

Two millennia earlier the Apostle Paul, a man rigorously trained from his early years in the best Rabbinic schools, “was caught up to the third heaven . . . into Paradise and heard inexpressible words” (2 Cor 12:2-4). This experience, along with his vision on the road to Damascus, overpowered his logical mind and confirmed the crucified Messiah and His Resurrection.

Often, because of our knowledge, pride, and self-assurance, we refuse to bow before the wisdom of God until our own resources and confidence have been exhausted. Only when a quiet descends on our soul do we cease to blame God, confessing with the Prophet Job: “I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye sees You. Therefore I depreciate myself, and waste away. I regard myself as dust and ashes” (Job 42:5-6).

In today’s epistle passage, the Apostle Paul writes to the congregation of Christians at Corinth. These babes in Christ had fallen into quarreling and were belaboring each other, claiming, “‘I am of Paul,’ or ‘I am of Apollos,’ or ‘I am of Cephas,’ or ‘I am of Christ’” (1 Cor 1:12). Although we may cloak our errors in the teachings of a Saint, or even the words of Christ, they actually reveal our self-exaltation and pride.

The Apostle Paul sees that these converts, though nominally united to the Lord, have yielded to a false reliance on the “wisdom of words” (vs. 17) in place of the ineffable wisdom of the “message of the Cross” (vs. 18). Saint Paul exposes the limits of Greek philosophy and Rabbinic teaching, the two systems of thought upon which these converts have placed their trust. Of course, his diagnosis applies equally to Orthodox Christians in this present age, for we are products of a culture that disdains “the foolishness of God” in favor of science and technology.

The worldviews of the Greek philosophers and rabbis of first-century Judaism, although very different from one another, rely upon ideas formed by the human mind. The philosophers believed that by reasoning and dialogue they could plumb the mystery of existence. However, the Stoics, Platonists, Aristotelians, and Epicureans merely quarreled among themselves.

Similarly, the rabbis were articulate in the details of Scripture, yet they did not know the living God proclaimed in its verses. Then, as now, the Cross of the crucified Christ made “foolish [all the] wisdom of this world” (vs. 20).

Presently, modern science and rationalism permeate the world’s cultures. We expect our computer terminals and satellites to infuse all mankind with technological confidence. Father Seraphim Rose says of these teachers of human achievement and wisdom: “We are just as sophisticated as they are; we are just as aware of modern science and modern learning” (*Orthodox Word*, No. 175-176, 1994, p. 152).

Human “wisdom” will always falter before that of God Incarnate. We are unable to understand Love, meekly accepting wounds and death for those He Himself created.

By the mere planting of Thy Cross, O Christ, death didst shake; for Thou whom hades did swallow eagerly, it delivered up with trembling, for Thou hast revealed salvation, O Lord. – Orthros verse for the Elevation of the Cross

September 15 - Sunday after the Elevation of the Cross (12th Sunday after Pentecost)
Galatians 2:16-20

Crucified With Christ: Galatians 2:16-20, especially vs 20: *“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, Who loved me and gave Himself for me.”* Looming over the days of September that lead up to and follow after the Feast of the Elevation of the Life-Giving Cross on September Fourteenth, Self-giving of Christ our God directs our hearts to the call upon us to Crucifixion. His Precious Cross draws us to the image of ‘The Extreme Humility,’ the cost of living “by faith in the Son of God Who loved me and gave Himself for me” (vs 20).

Remember that after each service through the year, we file forward for the blessing to kiss the Cross extended to us. o what purpose do our Priests hold the Lord Jesus’ Crucifixion before us? he blessing Cross teaches, nay, urges us to embrace suffering, a thought woven into the Apostle’s words today. Saint Paul calls on us to make our life and words true, to look deeply into ourselves, as in a spiritual mirror, and having looked to say, “I have been crucified with Christ,” or more exactly in the original, “With Christ I have been co-crucified” (vs 20). Each of us was crucified in Christ, not apart from Him, as if any crucifixion of ours could happen separately from the Savior. The crucifixion of each Christian occurred once in AD 33, with Christ. How can this be? It is through the “operation and indwelling” of the Holy Spirit.

“Dost thou unite thyself unto Christ?” is asked before Baptism. I said (and I say), “I do,” and the Church prays that I might “be a...partaker of the death and resurrection of Christ our God.” Yes, two thousand years intervene between us and Christ’s Cross. But foremost, since He is eternal, His Crucifixion is not bound by time, but is forever suffused with the power of the Eternal God-Man. Think then in terms of the hymnody of Great and Holy Thursday: “Today He is suspended on a Tree, who suspended the earth over the waters.”

A personal cross was placed around the neck of each of us at Baptism, reminding each one that we “have been crucified with Christ.” Co-crucifixion is not an ideal, but participation, an essential truth, eternal in dimension that overcomes all of types and forms of death.

What follows our co-crucifixion after we say, “I have been crucified with Christ?” Heed the Apostle: “It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.” There is no more “I.” Let us submit all our thoughts, desires, choices, and acts (the elements of our present existence) and join them to the Lord and to His Cross. To Him refer and defer, and with Him confer.

Let us refer our thoughts to the Lord (Php 2:5). Let us defer to His will (Ps 142:11), and confer with Him at each step in life (Jn 6:68). Thus, battle and struggle are joined; how often “my” and “self” want to turn back. I am in continuous trial. Saint John of Sinai says of this constant effort that it “brings about a cooling of the fire of the heart through mental confession.” By grace we find our way through that which the Abbot of Sinai calls “blessed gladdening sorrow” and find we are able to crucify our desires and passions and ‘live’ in Christ.

The “self” dies hard! Saint Paul says to all who would risk being co-crucified with Christ: “the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God.” Let us make his words our own and trust in the Lord Jesus, for “Life” is Him “Who loved me and gave Himself for me.” Father Paul Tarazi says of Christ’s love, “It is this love which is the origin of everything that brings about our salvation, and it is nothing less than love on our part that can show forth the fact that we have indeed received God’s gift in Christ. Faith...does not at all secure our salvation, [and] cannot at all prove to be truly faith...unless it passes the test of love.”

Lord, in faith and love I stand before Thee submitting all despair to Thy deep mercy.

September 16 - Monday of the Thirteenth Week after Pentecost
2 Corinthians 8:7-15

Liberality: 2 Corinthians 8:7-15, especially vs. 9: “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.” With His overflowing grace God provides for His servants during their earthly existence. The Lord reassures us of this, saying “Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? . . . For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Mt 6:25, 32-33).

We see many variations in how spiritual gifts and material resources are distributed among the faithful. Nevertheless, Saint Paul encourages everyone, regardless of his resources, to “abound in . . . liberality (2 Cor 8:2). In challenging us to be generous, the apostle stresses that liberality is a grace from God, and he would “see that [we] abound in this grace also” (vs. 7).

Saint Paul places *liberality* in the same class with several other God-given graces: faith, inspired speech, knowledge, diligence, and love (vs. 7). God extends His grace with each virtue; He invests His energies in our struggle to carry out good works.

How do we respond to the apostle’s challenge to us to “see that you abound” (vs. 7)? In the struggle to attain virtue and God’s grace, we often meet with an obstacle in the form of a lack of strength. We may fail to love others, to have sufficient faith in Christ, or to give generously. First and foremost, we need to cooperate with God so our efforts succeed (vs. 8). When we cooperate with Him, we discover the true roots of faith, genuine love, and liberal giving. It is the grace of God, not our own capacities, that helps us to manifest a life pleasing to the Lord, for He works through our words and deeds so long as we trust in Him.

Knowing that God’s graces come to us when we love the Lord, the apostle does not ask us to be generous “by commandment,” but as a test of “the sincerity of [our] love” for others (vs. 8). Let us heed Saint Paul’s challenge to the Corinthian church, for he is confronting all of us who consider ourselves His disciples. Are we pledged to walk before the Lord and follow His ways?

The apostle asks, “Do you really love one another as Christ our God requires? Then try to love others, and show your love by giving liberally.” Material gifts are a visible way to support and care for others in their need. Our efforts become a “litmus test” of genuine love.

No single act will uphold or condemn us before the dread Judgment Seat of Christ, for the Lord Jesus looks into our hearts. To the Lord’s eye, each of our actions reflects our heart’s desire. He seeks to find the smallest trace of faith and love within us. And often grace follows our efforts to be faithful, for “though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich” (vs. 9).

In his conclusion (vss. 10-15) Saint Paul encourages those who may lack the means to be charitable, urging them not to despair. *Liberality* is never measured by the amount given. The Lord says to us, “Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you” (Lk 6:38).

God does not measure our liberality in human currency alone. Let us remember the Lord’s own self-giving as we pray for the gift of liberality, asking to imitate the widow who cast in her two mites (Mk 12:42).

O Giver of life, may we Thy servants bear fruit and do good works pleasing unto Thee. – Adapted from Hebrews 13:15-16

September 17 - Tuesday of the Thirteenth Week after Pentecost
2 Corinthians 8:16-9:5

When Asked to Give: 2 Corinthians 8:16-9:5, especially vs. 9:5: *“Prepare your generous gift beforehand . . . that it may be ready as a matter of generosity and not as a grudging obligation.”* The Mosaic law requires both tithes and offerings upon the holy tables of God’s Temple (Dt 12:6, 11). The tithe (ten percent of one’s increase) was commanded by God, while offerings were gifts offered in joy and thanksgiving, or as a sacrifice in the hour of painful need. Today, our tithes support regular worship, covering the costs of clergy and facilities, while offerings are made for special needs of the parish, the poor, or the afflicted.

Many faithful Christians are often asked to donate to social service agencies, inter-Orthodox charities and missions, and secular entities of many types. How does one decide between these causes when solicited?

Today’s reading provides basic apostolic advice concerning offerings requested within the Church by worthy agencies such as International Orthodox Christian Charities, Orthodox Christian Mission Center, Orthodox Christian Prison Ministry, and special drives for particular projects sponsored by the Church, either nationally or at the parish level.

When Saint Paul wrote this epistle, he was administering an extensive collection of funds for famine relief provided by the Gentile churches on behalf of suffering Christians in Judea. His words were addressed to the Gentile disciples. However, they apply to every Christian donor. The apostle addresses the spiritual benefits of offerings, the correct attitude toward the recipients when conveying gifts, and the appropriate state of heart and mind on the part of those who give. On the basis of his immediate famine relief project, the Apostle describes the spiritual benefits of almsgiving and free-will offerings. First, such giving reveals “the glory of the Lord Himself and [shows our] ready mind” (vs. 19). When we respond to the prompting “to do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith” (Gal 6:10), God’s glory is made visible before men. The work of the Spirit is exhibited for all to see in the form of goodness, love, and generosity.

Further on, the apostle advises us against resisting those from established and proven Church agencies who appeal for offerings. If someone legitimately approaches us in the name of the Church, that appeal should not meet with automatic opposition. Here are Saint Paul’s arguments: those asking come with genuine concern for us (2 Cor 8:16); they are diligently serving our common Lord “of [their] own accord” (vs. 17); their work is praised “throughout all the churches” (vs. 18).

These agencies provide “honorable things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men” (vs. 21) and are considered official “messengers of the churches” (vs. 23). While there is no requirement that we give to every appeal, neither should we automatically reject requests. Let us pray for light!

Finally, we note that Saint Paul encourages us to offer as much we are able “as a matter of generosity and not as a grudging obligation” (vs. 9:5). God bestows blessings upon us when our heart is united to Him.

For this reason we avoid social pressure and giving merely out of guilt and obligation. Instead, we listen to the appeals of fellow Christians, look into our heart, consider with prayer what we are able to do, and plan our giving accordingly, always listening to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

O Christ our God, accept our oblations and sacrifices of praise, that is the fruit of lips that acknowledge Thy name; and aid us in doing good to all with offerings pleasing unto Thee. –
Adapted from Hebrews 13:15-16

September 18 - Wednesday of the Thirteenth Week after Pentecost
2 Corinthians 9:12-10:7

Doing What Pleases God: 2 Corinthians 9:12-10:7, especially vs. 12: “*The administration of this service not only supplies the needs of the saints but also is abounding through many thanksgivings to God.*” The eternal Word of God became incarnate, and this wonder of God-in-the-flesh still astounds our hearts and minds! We contemplate this mystery at the Feast of the Nativity, when the Church sings: “Today the infinite essence is wrapped in swaddling clothes in Bethlehem. . . O Thou who was incarnate of the Virgin, Christ our God, save our souls.”

How can we fully participate in such a great salvation? Which of our thoughts, feelings, and deeds best cooperates with the will of God? Which actions truly express our *thanksgiving* for the miracle of the Incarnation? Do we care for the starving and homeless, build beautiful temple filled with men and women who worship Him, or nurse the suffering back to life in His name?

Saint Paul is immensely pleased when the Corinthian Christians take action to relieve the physical needs of their fellow Christians who are suffering (Acts 11:28-30). Surely their actions give God great joy, for our heavenly Father is pleased to see His hungry children fed when they are starving, sheltered when they are homeless, and nurtured when they are sick.

We should never minimize the importance such acts hold in God’s eyes. Nevertheless, God finds the greatest joy when we seek to fulfill our “confession to the gospel of Christ” (2 Cor 9:13). First and foremost, God seeks repentance and the renewal of our hearts. As the Incarnate Lord tells us, “There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents” (Lk 15:7, 10).

God’s saving work in us is expressed in our acts of mercy such as feeding the hungry and healing the sick, insofar as God has healed us. When our bondage to sin is broken by the grace of repentance, we are able to fully live the life in Christ. The inner state of the people is God’s highest priority, regardless of whether we live at Corinth, Jerusalem, or Los Angeles. This divine priority applies to all of us!

For this reason Saint Paul praises this evidence “of the exceeding grace of God” (2 Cor 9:14). The abundance in food pleases God, but even greater is the overflowing of hearts “in many thanksgivings [the Greek word is *eucharists*] to God” (vs. 12).

The Christians at Jerusalem likewise see proof of grace in the generous acts of the Corinthians and also glorify God (vs. 13). Why? Because they see Him at work in the hearts and minds of their fellow Christians. Saint Paul rejoices because the brethren in Judea are praying for those at Corinth, asking for more “evidence of the heart” to confirm the renewal and blessing of God in the lives of their benefactors. The apostle understands that these actions evince the “indescribable gift” of God, always a cause for deep thanksgiving (vs. 15).

The apostle then addresses those who mistakenly see his Christ-like “meekness and gentleness” as a character fault (vss. 10:1-7). Some believe he ought to be “bold with confidence” rather than “lowly among [them]” (vss. 1-2).

“Do you look at things according to the outward appearance?” he chides (vs. 7). “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh” (vs. 3). Spiritual warfare has different rules of engagement than human warfare. People of the Spirit will destroy “arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God” (vs. 5). Above all, let us labor to repent, so that the quality of our hearts be greatly pleasing to God.

Cleanse our hearts by Thy Holy Spirit, that we may worthily magnify Thy name, O Lord. – Western Rite Liturgical Prayer to the Holy Spirit

September 19 - Thursday of the Thirteenth Week after Pentecost
2 Corinthians 10:7-18

Spiritual Rivalry: 2 Corinthians 10:7-18, especially vs. 18: *“For not he who commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends.”* Terrible evils of every sort have erupted in the Church during her long history, enough to make us weep. One of the worst and oft-repeated sins through the ages is spiritual rivalry. All such contentions comes straight from hell, for Satan ignites our egos to slander and attack others for the sake of our self-serving positions. The demons play upon our passions and provoke us to accept decisions based on mass popularity.

The present reading gives us insight into how a spiritual rivalry emerged in the midst of Saint Paul’s very own mission field, “within the limits of the sphere which God appointed” to him (vs. 13). We detect three tactics used by the apostle’s rivals: feigned piety, the presumption of authority, and a display of “connections.” Let us read prayerfully so that God might illumine us and help us avoid being drawn into ecclesiastical rivalries. Rather, we are to conduct ourselves modestly and to the glory of God whenever we confront such evils.

The Apostle Paul is slandered by rivals who come to Corinth and start questioning his claim to be a Christian. They suggest that Saint Paul’s spiritual life lacks the depth and power derived from first-hand knowledge of the Lord, while in turn presenting themselves as the true representatives of Christ (vs. 7).

To such insinuations, the apostle simply replies, “If anyone is convinced in himself that he is Christ’s, let him again consider this in himself, that just as he is Christ’s, even so we are Christ’s” (vs. 7). Indeed, it is spiritually treacherous for us to question another’s relationship to Christ, or to slander the piety of other Christians.

Saint Paul warns the Corinthians of this in his earlier epistle: “But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. . . . He who judges me is the Lord” (1 Cor 4:3-4). Let us avoid those who advance their own claims to piety by degrading or belittling the faith and spiritual life of others. Such actions are never pleasing to the Lord.

The apostle’s rivals scorn his authority. When he is not present, they try to undermine his status in the minds of the faithful. They suggest that “his letters . . . are weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible” (2 Cor 10:10). The use of such slurs and innuendos may attract the weak and foolish, who “look at things according to the outward appearance” only (vs. 7). Such actions, however, are nothing more than backbiting.

Sometimes our rulers pretend to be open and humble when they are not. Saint Paul warns his disciples in Corinth to “consider this, that what we are in word by letters when we are absent, such we will also be in deed when we are present” (vs. 11). Had they forgotten that he was the first to come to them and preach the gospel (vs. 14)? Discernment is a gift from God; let us take care when judging all outward appearances and rash claims.

Finally, the rivals of Saint Paul commend themselves on the basis of knowing the right people. They insinuate that they are connected with the main group of apostles. Saint Paul responds with two points. First, the Corinthians became Christians because of his ministry (vss. 14-16); second, the only secure basis for assurance of faith is knowledge of Christ.

Therefore, let him “who glories . . . glory in the Lord” (vs. 17). We should pay strict attention to the hidden sources of a person’s spiritual life, to see whether his or her claims are of the Lord or merely a form of self-styled promotion.

O Christ, we thank Thee for the grace of membership and the joy of fellowship in Thy holy Church; so knit us all to Thee that we may ever support one another in faith and in love. –
Thanksgiving Prayer, Saint Andrew Service Book

September 20 - Friday of the Thirteenth Week after Pentecost
2 Corinthians 11:5-12

Undermining Pastors: 2 Corinthians 11:5-12, especially vs. 12: *“But what I do, I will also continue to do, that I may cut off the opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the things of which they boast.”* In this epistle Saint Paul refutes a number of attacks aimed at him by certain “false apostles” (vs. 13). These men are opportunists seeking to undermine his pastoral authority with the congregation at Corinth. He writes to his people to correct the false accusations of these “deceitful workers” who are bent on “transforming themselves into apostles of Christ” (vs. 13).

The first tactic of these scheming detractors is to suggest that Paul is an inferior apostle (vs. 5). Ironically, he opened this door himself when he said in an earlier epistle, “I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am” (1 Cor 15:9-10).

We should not let this humble statement mislead us. Saint Paul is secure in his call to serve as an apostle, having been ordained by the Lord Himself. He further states that “His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all” (1 Cor 15:10). Now, referring to the Twelve, he says, “For I consider that I am not at all inferior to the most eminent apostles” (2 Cor 11:5). Nevertheless, those who are trying to tear down Saint Paul and subvert his ministry suggest that he is inferior to the “real” leaders.

The second tactic of the apostle’s detractors is to attack his preaching and teaching abilities (vs. 6). Speaking and communicating are central tasks required of all pastors. However, we should always remember that not even the most eloquent orator is “worthy to approach or draw nigh or to serve [the] King of glory,” as we sing in the Cherubic Hymn, let alone to speak of Him who is “unspeakable and boundless.”

We may be tempted to criticize our priest’s speaking style. Perhaps he preaches for too long, or speaks too briefly; he rambles, or he is over-organized. He never preaches from Scripture, or only preaches from Scripture; he speaks too loudly, or too softly. And yet life-changing communication of the gospel by preaching is the work of the Holy Spirit. God reaches our hearts through His clergy, who are devoted to Him and His truth.

The third device used by the agitators attacking Saint Paul is to disparage his humble life-style (vs. 7). Many clergy are paid far below the level warranted by their training, education, and job descriptions, and yet they serve joyfully. If we devalue them based on marketplace criteria, we belittle everyone who is engaged in pastoral ministry.

The Lord Jesus warns of this when He calls Saint Paul into service: “For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake” (Acts 9:16). It is an ugly sin for us to exploit a man’s dedication to Christ our God by refusing him a deserved income.

Finally, the Apostle Paul’s opponents suggest that this giant among men does not love his people (2 Cor 11:11). This type of insinuation represents the low point among the methods used to undermine our pastors. To those who use this tactic, Saint Paul simply replies, “God knows!” (vs. 11). Do his self-sacrifice and labors not provide sufficient evidence? What more needs to be said? Who among us can adequately return the love with which Christ loves us? At times the frailty of our priests reveals itself, for clergy, too, are human. They can bumble and falter. Remember, everyone lacks certain skills and fails at loving. Pray for and honor the men of God. *Axios* – they are worthy!

Strengthen Thy pastors, O Lord, to labor, at all times, worthy of Thy calling upon them. – Prayer for the Priesthood

September 21 – Saturday of the Thirteenth Week after Pentecost
1 Corinthians 2:6-9

Two Wisdoms: 1 Corinthians 2:6-9, especially vs. 7: “*But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory. . . .*” In today’s verses the Apostle Paul contrasts two types of wisdom: “the wisdom of God” (vs. 7) and “the wisdom of this age” (vs. 6). He finds neither common ground nor mutual comprehension between the two wisdoms, for they partake of different natures.

Saint Paul seeks to convince the faithful that we have a sound basis for grasping the truth of the mystery of God’s *hidden wisdom* (vs. 7). At the same time, he wants us to understand that our worldly ideological leaders neither accept nor respect God’s wisdom. At a fundamental level, they rely upon “the wisdom of this age” (vs. 6).

Saint Paul challenges us to hold fast to the life and truth we have embraced in Christ. The apostle would have us confront the insuperable wisdom-gap we find in this world, so that we may move past the barrier that confounds “the rulers of this age” (vs. 8). In this way we avoid participating in the greatest blunder in all of history, when men “crucified the Lord of glory” (vs. 8).

Note that there are two usages of the word *glory* in this passage. One is found in the phrase “the Lord of glory” (vs. 8), and while the other describes God’s wisdom “ordained before the ages for our glory” (vs. 7). We know that glory is ascribed to God, simply by listening to the Church’s many hymns: “Glory to Thee, who hast shown us the light. Glory to God in the highest,” “Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit,” etc.

However, in this text Saint Paul also speaks of “the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for *our* glory” (vs. 7). This assignment of glory to us, as fallen human beings, may seem surprising and unexpected.

We remember that God the Word, “the Lord of glory,” Jesus Christ our Savior, came and dwelt within our limited human realm in order to deliver God’s wisdom in a manner we could grasp. He became a man, thereby manifesting God’s *hidden wisdom* before our very eyes (vs. 7).

This Lord of Glory came not merely to dazzle us with His wisdom, but also to transform us so that we might love as He loves. From before time, “God has prepared [things] for those who love Him” (vs. 9). The loving glory of God became manifest in Christ Jesus, and He made it possible for us to express it as well: we deliberately return His love and extend His kindness to others in turn. The wrappings are off of the “wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory” (vs. 7). God’s wisdom is no longer hidden from our hearts, if we will open ourselves to Him. True, “none of the rulers of this age [know]” (vs. 8) that Christ is Wisdom incarnate. Because they are spiritually blind, they close their hearts to Him and “crucified the Lord of glory” (vs. 8). But they would not have done so “had they known” (vs. 8) Him as He is.

To know Him is not difficult. We need only receive Him, for “as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (Jn 1:12-13). That is the witness of the gospel.

Indeed, Saint Paul tells us, the glory of the Lord can be ours. God prepared a “transfer” of His glory to us before time, before the dawn of history, before the ages began. As children of God, we can receive the glory He prepared for us and share this love through Christ.

Master, grant me love unfeigned and the true wisdom to fulfill Thy commandments. – Post-communion Prayer

September 22 – Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost
1 Corinthians 16:13-24

Of Love and Such: 1 Corinthians 16:13-24, especially vs. 24: “My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen.” These verses are the closing portion of Saint Paul’s first letter to the congregation he established at Corinth. He is writing to a group of people he loves, having spent years with them. He personally signs his name (vs. 21) and affectionately singles out individuals (vss. 15, 17). He also mentions fellow believers, known and beloved in Corinth, who are worshiping with him at present in Ephesus (vs. 19).

The only negative note Saint Paul strikes is found in his directive to repudiate anyone who “does not love the Lord Jesus Christ” (vs. 22). Given that Corinth was a huge pagan city, his apostolic anathema was likely directed to a few specific persons who at one time had shared the congregation’s life, then later rejected the Christian faith to return to pagan ways.

Saint Paul’s words challenge us to consider our relationships within the church communities of which we are members. We are to conduct ourselves in a loving manner toward all (vs. 14). We are to minister to the saints personally (vs. 15), refreshing others in the spirit (vs. 18), recognizing one another “heartily in the Lord” (vs. 19), and greeting each other “with a holy kiss” (vs. 20). In short, we are to extend love to “all in Christ Jesus” (vs. 24).

Indeed, we should feel challenged by these words, for we are all too familiar with how polite distance, cliques, diffidence, or formalism often divide us. May God forgive our coldness, and help us to move beyond it. If we are to nurture personal connections with our fellow believers, it requires us to go beyond attending liturgy and tithing to support the church as an institution. We have to maintain *love* for others with whom we are one in Christ.

Every personal relationship requires us to consider the other’s needs, problems, moods, and concerns. If we are to love, we must step outside of ourselves and enter into the lives of others. We deliberately seek ways to offer service to them.

This movement away from self and toward the other reflects our commitment to loving like Christ. Adopting the Lord’s standard of self-giving, we seek to refresh the hearts of others while recognizing that we may be called to sacrifice our own needs and desires.

To recognize others “heartily in the Lord” (vs. 19) requires more than social formalities or chatting at coffee hour. We allow the Lord to establish our boundaries. We cannot act based on our thoughts and ideas alone. Rather, we must respond from the heart – from a spirit informed by the mind of Christ, by His concerns, and by His heart. At times the Lord may guide may us to show restraint. If we have not yet attained trustworthy purity of heart, let us speak carefully and with respect for others.

The “holy kiss” that the apostle mentions in verse 20 can still be witnessed during the Divine Liturgy when two or more priests are concelebrating. They greet each other with a kiss after the injunction to “love one another, that with one mind we may confess” the Nicene Creed.

Likewise, Orthodox Christians often exchange a kiss on the cheek when meeting one another. Our emphasis, of course, is on the holy aspect of the kiss, especially when greeting the opposite gender. Beyond this, our greetings convey our genuine affection in Christ and the joy we share as His disciples.

“We have thought, O God, of Thy mercy in the midst of Thy people,” cries the Psalmist David. (Ps 47:8). With him we offer this prayer to God, “Turn Thy face away from my sins, and blot out all my transgressions. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me” (Ps 51:9-10). May God give us all grace to love the brethren in Christ.

Let us commend ourselves and each other and all our life unto Christ our God. – Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom

September 23 – Monday of the Fourteenth Week after Pentecost
2 Corinthians 12:10-19

Truly Apostolic: 2 Corinthians 12:10-19, especially vs. 12: “Truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds.” Chapters 10-12 of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians reveals the anguish of a father separated from his children, yet still fighting for their hearts and souls. In order to appreciate Saint Paul’s pain and the effort he pours into his letter, it is helpful to read these entire chapters in one sitting before focusing on the closing verses appointed for today.

If we do so, we will discover that the present verses aptly summarize what comes before. In capsule form, they also reveal Saint Paul’s vision of apostleship. We are able to identify seven marks or signs of an apostle – signs we find in every true Father of the faith just as surely today as in the Church two thousand years ago.

First, we observe that a true apostolic leader, one whose ministry focuses solely on the Lord Jesus, will rejoice even when he is being rejected. He hears the Lord’s words with the eyes and ears of his heart: “Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake” (Mt 5:11).

To *take pleasure* when we are thrust into need, reproached, or persecuted is a rare but beautiful quality that comes from Christ Himself. It enables those who love the Lord Jesus to find peace even when painful things happen “for Christ’s sake” (2 Cor 12:10).

Second, serving the Lord’s flock awakens a consciousness of personal nothingness in the true servant of Christ (vs. 11). Saint Paul, in his work as an apostle, endured deprivation, exhaustion, danger, and risk to his very life (vss. 11:23-27). He learned about his own frailty and mortality, even as he found limitless strength in Christ Jesus. For this reason he can frankly say, “I am nothing” (vs. 12:10) while remaining strong in Christ.

Third, a genuine Father in God shows *perseverance* (vs. 12). Some translations use “patience” here, but Saint Paul’s emphasis is on the personal tenacity and constancy required in the face of great difficulty. Only with perseverance were “the signs of an apostle . . . accomplished among you” (vs. 12).

Fourth, we know that from the start the Apostle Paul never asked for money or “in-kind” support from these fledgling Christians. He did not wish to *burden* the Lord’s people (vs. 13), a trait we see reflected in other true pastors.

For example, Archpriest Constantine Popoff was assigned to the Saint Nicholas parish in Joliet, Illinois, at the height of the Great Depression. His first liturgy was served with borrowed candles, with neither chanter nor choir. The parish’s money had disappeared along with the parishioners’ jobs in the economic downturn. The priest saw his modest starting salary cut in half within two years, yet he stayed and suffered with his flock in Joliet for a full fourteen years.

In Father Popoff and Saint Paul, we find evidence of a non-materialistic spirit, a fifth mark of a true apostolic servant. Such men “very gladly spend and [are] spent for” God’s people (vs. 15). They perceive themselves as parents who “lay up for . . . the children” (vs. 14).

The sixth mark of a true Father in God is love for His people. The Apostle Paul tells the Corinthians, “I love you” (vs. 15). Always, “the good shepherd gives his life for the sheep” (Jn 10:11). Godly pastors emulate the Lord Jesus as their model of love and self-sacrifice.

The seventh mark of a true Father is that his sole aim is “[our] edification” (2 Cor 12:19). Unlike the hireling “who does not own the sheep” (Jn 10:12), the true pastor neither flees nor abandons his flock, for he cares for its members and guides their development.

Bless, O Good Shepherd, Thy pastors whom Thou hast appointed to nurture Thy flock.

DYNAMIS – Orthodox Christian Prison Ministry * 276 5th Ave * Ste 704-3036 * New York, NY 10001

September 24 – Tuesday of Fourteenth Week after Pentecost
2 Corinthians 12:20-13:2

Forsaking: 2 Corinthians 12:20-13:2, especially vs. 2: *“I have told you before, and foretell as if I were present the second time, and now being absent I write to those who have sinned before, and to all the rest, that if I come again I will not spare. . . .”* The Apostle Paul warns the Christians at Corinth that he is prepared to take disciplinary action if necessary. His message is clear: they are to forsake every thought and action opposed to the life in Christ (vss. 20-21).

Although he is armed with the authority of the Lord, Saint Paul does not wish to endure the pain of correcting those whom he has catechized. Their behavior is unseemly, however, and the wrongdoers know better (vs. 21)! His warnings are merciful, as if coming from the Lord.

Since we live in a neo-pagan environment – a bawdy, pleasure-centered milieu very similar to first-century Corinth – we would do well to heed Saint Paul’s rebukes. Our present culture differs little from that of Saint Paul’s day: all we have to do is compare the sins the apostle describes with what pours out of the media.

The apostle urges us to forsake such sins, purify ourselves, and determine to struggle against the pleasure-loving culture that prevails on every side. Otherwise, we may find ourselves worthy of firm, corrective pastoral action.

The apostle mentions two sorts of sins: those divisive offenses that beset us as we quarrel or disdain others (vs. 20), and uncleanness – the impurities of heart, soul, and body that arise from sensual temptations (vs. 21). In the former case we become *contentious*, *jealous*, and given to angry *outbursts* (vs. 20). An example of the latter is when we condone or indulge in prurient thoughts such as: “What’s the matter with watching that program?” “What’s wrong with a little off-color joke?” “I don’t think it is the end of the world if someone has an affair.”

Saint Paul explains to the faithful at Corinth, “I wrote to you . . . not to keep company with sexually immoral people. Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But . . . not to keep company with anyone named a brother” who does these things (1 Cor 5:9-11).

This world, lacking spiritual moorings, drifts away from the beauty of salvation. Let us be quick to remember that “the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor 6:9)! Instead, we monitor our inner life to avoid engaging even with thoughts about the sins Saint Paul deplors. Before the Lord, and by His grace, we can refuse the moral disorder that endangered the faithful at Corinth (vs. 20). If we are attracted to sin, let it become a call to repentance! We start with monitoring and self-examination. We then turn to godly sorrow and sacramental confession, begging help from the Holy Spirit. We avoid tempting occasions, quiet our random thoughts, and express heartfelt gratitude to God who snatched us “out of the fire” (Amos 4:11).

As determined Christians, we must take up this process as our personal cross, since the surest way of living is to die with Christ “walk in newness of life” (Rom 6:4). May we settle on our choices and never allow ourselves to drift into the tide of immorality rising on every side.

Only in this way do we avoid the painful discipline of which the apostle warns. Our priests guard their flock and forgive those who stray, but they also correct us when we persist in sin. Like Saint Paul, they “live with [Christ] by the power of God” (2 Cor 13:4). Let us forsake sin and never provoke our pastors.

Let my beseechings be wholly acceptable to Thee, that my transgressions not prevent the descent of the Holy Spirit, and that I may ever cry to Thee without condemnation, O Lord. – Great Blessing of the Waters

September 25 - Wednesday of the Fourteenth Week after Pentecost
2 Corinthians 13:3-14

Is Christ in You? 2 Corinthians 13:3-14, especially vss. 3, 5: “*Since you seek a proof of Christ speaking in me. . . . Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?*” False apostles came to Corinth undermining Saint Paul’s character and ministry (2 Cor 11:5-12). They successfully eroded the confidence of the members of the congregation and forced him to counter their challenge, for the gospel and salvation are at stake.

The question Paul poses in verse 5 is an appropriate challenge for us as Christians. Just as Saint Paul urges the Corinthians to “examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith” (vs. 5), let us likewise “test [ourselves]” (vs. 5).

The issue of “Christ within” is the litmus test of our genuine commitment to Christ. Saint Paul would have us examine whether Christ is truly within us. Is an inner voice motivating me in Christ? Let us test this voice to see if it belongs to the Lord who was crucified in weakness, but now lives by the power of God. Who is the governing Truth in my life?

Through the Holy Spirit, Christ Jesus indwells those who receive the mystery of holy baptism, for He shares His life, death, and Resurrection with His own. As the baptismal hymn declares, “As many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Gal 3:27).

Yet Archimandrite Sophrony adds, “Unless the connection is a personal one, there can be no conception of sin, no love between man and God, no existential knowledge of God; and all is swallowed up by death, obliterated in a very literal non-existence” (*On Prayer*, p. 187).

This possibility of death and obliteration leads Saint Paul to another arresting question: “Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? – unless indeed you are disqualified” (2 Cor 13:5). When the voice speaking within us is Christ our God, we hear Him when sin looms. He confronts our rationalizations; He does not accept excuses. Christ is gentle but firm, truthful yet ready to forgive. Do we hear this Christ, our God and King?

Christ Jesus our Lord confronts our misguided thoughts and action as no one else can, or will. He moves past our defenses and calls us to acknowledge our sin and cry out, “Have mercy upon me and save me.”

Christ within directs us to the sacrament of confession. As we are kneeling before Him, He fills us with loving assurance of forgiveness. He awakens us by loving us in spite of our sin: “Bring me into the house of wine; set love before me” (SS 2:4). He encourages our relationship with Him to grow and blossom: “My beloved is mine, and I am his, he who shepherds his flock among the lilies” (vs. 2:16).

Are we able to say “I know Him”? Such knowledge needs testing, “for Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light” (2 Cor 11:14) to deceive many. Christ always comes to us in weakness so as never to force Himself on us. Domination is not the way of divine love.

Christ lets love and truth alone draw us to purity of life. Only a living Lord is able to raise us from the death of sin to newness of life (Rom 6:6-8). Christ’s love offers the greatest power to enable and support. He enables us to yield ourselves “as instruments of righteousness to God,” never permitting “sin to have dominion over” us (vss. 13-14).

Let us pray for Christ to live within us; let Him become the governing truth in our life; let Him shape our every decision and choice with His light and love. If we find His presence growing dim, then we are to light the lamp, sweep the house, and search diligently until we have found the coin of His presence again (Lk 15:8).

O Jesus Christ, enlighten my mind with the imperishable light of knowledge of Thee. –
Archimandrite Sophrony Sakharov

**September 26 - September 26 – Repose of the Evangelist John
1 John 4:12-19**

Caveats on Love: 1 John 4:12-19, especially vs 19: *“We love Him because He first loved us.”* In the present passage from his First Epistle, Saint John the Theologian advances a series of twelve doctrines concerning love as known through the Person and work of Christ our Lord. To focus the Apostle’s message clearly, we are adding twelve caveats to His teaching for our readers to help avoid misinterpretation and to illumine the profound depths of this brief reading.

1) *“the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world”* (vs 14). After they associated as intimates of the Lord Jesus for three years experiencing and witnessing His Passion and Resurrection, the Apostles were illumined by the Holy Spirit to testify to Christ’s Divine nature. Direct relationship with the Incarnate Lord and the Spirit’s illumination formed their testimony.

2) *“we have known and believed the love that God has for us”* (vs 16). The Apostles knew the love that God has for all of mankind because they were loved by Lord Jesus Himself, enabling John to write, *“having loved His own...He loved them to the end”* (Jn 13:1).

3) *“God is love”* (1 Jn 4:16) John says concisely. The beloved disciple could speak in this terse but defining manner because of prolonged association with the Lord. The three years spent with Jesus produced enlightenment - an illumination that led to a dual revelation: a) that Jesus is Go, and b) that God’s nature is love. God’s love was plainly embodied in the words, acts, and life of the Lord Jesus (vs 16). *“Abiding”* (used here) was the means by which they learned. Abiding remains as we continue with the God Who is love incarnate (vs 16).

4) *“Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God”* (vs 15). We confessed Jesus as King and God in the Baptismal Mystery when each of us united his or her self to Him and bowed down before Him. God abides in us, and we in Him.

5) *“Love has been perfected among us....because as He is, so are we in this world”* (vs 17). Love is perfected; that is, love is completed in us by being and remaining united to Christ.

6) *“he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him”* (vss 12-16). Abiding may be translated as remaining. Choose to remain close to Him where He is present - in the Church.

7) *“We love Him because He first loved us”* (vs 19). Love won the Disciples’ hearts and turned them into Apostles; Divine Love is appealing to us until we return His love; and...

8) *“we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit”* (vs 13). As persons who chose to unite ourselves to Christ and were anointed with the Holy Spirit, the natural result should be to love others, never forgetting that to abide in Jesus we must give His love to others. God’s love cannot indwell our hearts and souls and stop cold there; for only...

9) *“If we love one another, God abides in us”* (vs 12). If we do not love others, then God’s love does not remain with us. Our Lord says, *“forgive to be forgiven, for the Father “forgives our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.”* Thus...

10) *“His love has been perfected in us”* (vs 12). Here, *“perfected”* implies *“completed”* as in a construction project. To be complete we must love others, even our enemies. Then...

11) *“we may have boldness in the day of judgment”* (vs 17), but only if we struggle to deepen our union with Christ and to love as the Apostles and the Saints did before us.

12) *“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment”* (vs 18). Why suffer fear’s torment? Let us love now, in this life, and Perfect Love Himself will rid us of our fears and will complete us with His love in the heavens. Amen!

O Lord, Who hast taught us that all our doings without love are worth nothing, send Thy Holy Spirit and pour into our hearts the gift of love, without which we are dead before Thee.

September 27 - Friday of the Fourteenth Week after Pentecost
Galatians 2:6-10

Favoritism and Grace: Galatians 2:6-10, especially vs. 6: “*God shows personal favoritism to no man. . . .*” This portion of verse 6 employs a classic Scriptural idiom rich in imagery and wisdom. In the original Greek, the passage literally reads, “God does not receive the face of a man.” These words recall the divine theophany (appearance) at the oak of Mamre, when the three angels visit the Patriarch Abraham (Gn 18:1-33). As soon Abraham sees the three young men, “he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the ground” (vs. 18:2).

In ancient practice, every lord, king, and great personage was expected to take hold of his prostrate subject and lift him up – thus receiving the face of his abject inferior. In such a fashion the mighty and the powerful showered favor on their subordinates, expressing good will toward those who abased themselves by bowing their faces to the ground.

Yet men of every rank must humbly approach the “God of gods, and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, [who] shows no partiality” – in other words, who looks man in the face without favoritism (Dt 10:17). God administers “justice for the . . . alien, the fatherless, and the widow” (vs. 18), for “there is no partiality with God” (Rom 2:11).

This standard measures every human ruler and judge. All are sternly warned, “It is not good to admire the person of the ungodly, nor is it holy to pervert righteousness in judgment” (Prv 18:5). This is the culture of God’s people, who address the Lord Jesus with the words: “Teacher, we know that You say and teach rightly, and You do not show personal favoritism, but teach the way of God in truth” (Lk 20:21).

In this passage from Galatians, Saint Paul refers to events earlier in his apostolic career, and in particular to a time when some imagined that he showed favoritism to win the support of the original apostles for his work among the Gentiles. However, he makes clear that such was not the case: “But from those who seemed to be something – whatever they were, it makes no difference to me . . . for those who seemed to be something added nothing to me” (Gal 2:6).

In fact, those “who seemed to be something” included Saint James, the Brother of the Lord, the Apostles Peter and John (vs. 9). They welcomed Paul’s work among the Gentiles. True apostolic leaders favor persons, work, and ministries where there is clear evidence of the grace of God (vss. 8-9). This inclination to follow proof of grace should not be taken as favoritism, but as respect for the hand of God at work in men’s hearts.

As we noted above, Orthodoxy rejects any teaching that suggests God gives grace capriciously. When God “lifts up a man’s face” and favors him, it is because He knows the man’s heart, his contrition and openness. When we love God, He knows; He is aware. When our love for God grows, “we feel divine longing well up within us from the depths of our heart” (*Philokalia* vol. 1, p. 280). According to Saint John Cassian, “The thief who received the kingdom of heaven, though not as a reward of virtue, is a true witness to the fact that salvation is ours through the grace and mercy of God” (p. 93).

God’s grace or favor toward us is known or experienced as a personal encounter. “Grace is not just a ‘gift’ of God, not just an object which God bestows on men, but a direct manifestation of the living God Himself, a personal confrontation between creature and Creator,” declares Bishop Kallistos Ware.

“When we say that the saints have been transformed or ‘deified’ by the grace of God, what we mean is that they have a direct experience of God Himself. They know God” (*The Orthodox Church*, p. 68). Blessed is the penitent whose face is lifted up by the hand of God!

May I ever remember Thy grace and live not unto myself, but unto Thee, O good Master. – Post-communion Prayer

September 28 - Saturday of the Fourteenth Week after Pentecost
1 Corinthians 4:1-5

Self-Examination: 1 Corinthians 4:1-5, especially vss. 3-4: *“In fact, I do not even judge myself. For I know nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord.”* The Apostle Paul raises an important issue for us when he says: “Consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God” (vs. 1). Do we, like Saint Paul, consider ourselves to be servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God?

If someone does not consider himself Christ’s servant, then he is free to set aside the need for self-examination. The questions we explore here are oriented to those of us who know that we are *servants*. At our baptism, we are asked, “Dost thou unite thyself unto Christ?” And if we can still assert, “I believe, O Lord, and I confess that Thou art truly the Christ, the Son of the living God who didst come into the world to save sinners of whom I am chief,” then self-examination is required of us. These two “ifs” are the watersheds of servanthood.

“Brethren, having come to see the shortness of our life and the vanity of this age, let us take care for the hour of death, leaving off the tumult of this world and the useless worldly cares,” Saint Paisius Velichkovsky says in urging Christ’s servants to undertake self-examination. “[Rather], we should even hide ourselves under the earth, mourn there over our sins while we are still alive, and live while dying for the sake of God in struggle” (*Little Russian Philokalia*, Vol. 4, 71).

Christ’s faithful servants are like navigators: we need to review how well we are “holding the course.” Are we, as stewards, managing the mysteries of God even as we claim to live in Christ? Christian life demands constant correction and self-evaluation, using the Lord’s standard of faithfulness, for “it is required in stewards that one be found faithful” (vs. 2).

Since we are “to live while dying for the sake of God in struggle,” let us turn to our father-confessor for help in considering our faithfulness. He is here to help us in our struggle in Christ. As our confessor directs, let us examine ourselves!

“Every evening, we must test ourselves as to how the day passed with us,” continues Saint Paisius, “and every morning we again should test ourselves as to how the night passed. And not only at some definite time but at every time and in every place and concerning everything we must give account to ourselves” (p. 81).

However, when we accept Saint Paul’s assertion that we, as stewards, are required to examine ourselves, we must take care to avoid a dangerous reef where we may easily founder and destroy ourselves. When we conduct our self-examination, let us never confuse this process with *judgment* (vss. 3-5). Thanks be to God, the apostle sharply warns against such confusion!

Judging, in the spiritual life, is the business of God alone. All judging, including spiritual judgment, concerns disposition. When an examination is conducted and all the evidence is weighed, the judge issues a disposition concerning the penitent standing before him. Such disposition details judgment: it is not the same as an on-course correction.

Ultimately, Christ will pass judgment and hand down our disposition as His stewards. This is why Saint Paul refuses to accept any human being’s judgment of his stewardship (vs. 3). Nor will he hazard judgments concerning himself, for “He who judges me is the Lord” (vs. 4). He explicitly directs us to “judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes” (vs. 5).

Our present urgent need is self-examination. As Saint Paisius says, “First, one must clean the royal house from every impurity and adorn it with every beauty, then the king may enter.”

O Lord, before Thee is all my desire, and my groaning is not hid from Thee. For in Thee have I hoped, O Lord. For I will declare mine iniquity, and I will take heed concerning my sin. – Psalm 37: 9, 15, 18

September 29 – Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost
2 Corinthians 1:21-2:4

The Gift of the Holy Spirit: 2 Corinthians 1:21-2:4, especially vss. 21-22: “Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.” Every Orthodox Christian, upon reading these two verses, will make a connection with our baptism and chrismation. The first sacrament establishes us as “a member and partaker of the death and resurrection of Christ,” while the other bestows on us “the seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

Such references are not coincidental, for in explaining why he changed his travel plans (vss. 1:15-2:13), the Apostle Paul alludes to these initiatory mysteries to call attention to the spiritual bond between himself and the Corinthians. In particular, he speaks of his apostolic team as “fellow workers for your joy” (2 Cor 1:24).

In the mystery of holy baptism, the candidate is “established” in the Lord Jesus – and with all others who are united to Christ (vs. 21). According to Father Alexander Schmemmann, baptism offers us a “unique and totally new possibility: truly to die with Christ, truly to rise again with Him . . . [and] thus truly to unite the human to the divine in the ‘newness of life’” (*Of Water and the Spirit*, p. 58). This bonding and uniting with Christ are what it means for us to be *established* in the Lord. The *anointing* of which the Apostle speaks in verse 21 actually refers to the anointing with “the Oil of Gladness” which precedes holy baptism. This pre-baptismal anointment is for our healing: for the restoration of the “hearing” of our heart, for the cleansing of our hands from evil, for our feet to walk in a life pleasing to God. By means of this holy oil, God “illumineth and sanctifieth.”

In verse 22, the apostle distinguishes this baptismal anointing from the anointing with holy chrism by his use of the word “also.” This “also” signals to us that God has done more, beyond establishing us in Christ. Hence, we understand that the two oils serve different sacramental purposes within the initiatory mystery.

The anointing before holy baptism is associated with our regeneration, which God carries out through our dying and rising with Christ. However, “the ‘sealing’ with holy chrism,” says Father Schmemmann, “is obviously a new act which, although prepared for and made possible by baptism, gives the liturgy of initiation a dimension so radically new that the Church always knew it to be another ‘mystery’ – a gift and a sacrament distinct from baptism. . . . [It is] the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit as gift!” (pp. 78-79).

Thus Holy Spirit acts in the mystery of baptism to effect regeneration and to unite us to Christ for healing and renewal. Furthermore, He comes within us constantly, becoming the divine indwelling presence within our spirits, souls, and bodies.

Father Schmemmann continues, “This gift of Christ’s own Holy Spirit and Christ’s own high calling is precisely a ‘gift.’ It does not belong to human nature as such, even though it is in order to receive this gift that man was created by God. Prepared and made possible by baptism . . . it takes man beyond baptism . . . making him ‘christ’ in Christ; by anointing him with the anointment of the Anointed One, it opens to man the door of theosis, of deification” (p. 80).

Let us always remember that these rites are only starting points, with a guaranteed potential in time. Established in the Lord, we are intended to move constantly closer to what God intends for us to become.

O Holy Spirit, Giver of life incorruptible, work in us those things which are pleasing in Thy sight and sanctify us with an imprescriptible hallowing of our souls and bodies. – Archimandrite Sophrony Sakharov

September 30 - Monday of the Fifteenth Week after Pentecost
Galatians 2:11-16

Church Unity: Galatians 2:11-16, especially vs. 11: “Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face. . . .” Before His Passion, Christ prayed to His heavenly Father that those who believe in Him would always “be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us” (Jn 17:21). Likewise Peter, apostle “to the circumcised” (Gal 2:9), and Paul, apostle to the Gentiles, labored and prayed for such unity. Indeed, Saint Peter says, “Be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers” (1 Pt 3:8-9).

Saint Paul’s message to us is the same, as clearly stated in his appeal to the brethren at Corinth: “Now I plead with you . . . that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Cor 1:10).

The truth is that any of us can contribute to a breach of unity in the Church, whether intentionally or unintentionally. None of us is above fomenting division by our words and actions. We know it happened in Antioch in apostolic times, when Saint Peter “withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision” (Gal 2:12).

No one is excused when such a breach occurs. Saint Paul recognizes this, for when he “saw that they [with Peter] were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel,” he speaks to Peter before all present (vs. 14). As our Master and Lord, Christ holds us responsible for contributing to the very unity that He entreated His Father to grant to us.

If we are responsible for a breach in the fellowship of the Church – whether out of fear (vs. 12) or hypocrisy (vs. 13), as in the Apostle Peter’s case, or from pride, vanity, selfishness, indulgence, or another sin – we are to follow Saint Peter’s godly example. We are to repent, admitting that we helped to cause the break, and then do what is necessary to correct the division and prevent it from continuing. We must promote the kind of healing that occurred at Antioch, as recorded in Holy Scripture.

In addition, we are to labor for the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace, just as Saint Peter did. Later in his career, he wrote to the Church concerning the same apostle who had called him to task at Antioch: “Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless; and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation – as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you” (2 Pt 3:14-15).

Further, we are to imitate the Apostle Paul by not standing idly by when divisions appear, but rather speaking out for the sake of healing. We are members of the Body of Christ, with a responsibility to do what we can from the place in the Church to which Christ has called us.

Saint Paul addresses his brother apostle “to his face, because he was to be blamed” (Gal 2:11). Nor does he restrict his comments to Peter alone, but includes “the rest of the Jews [who] also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy” (vs. 13).

We note that the separation of Peter and the others exposes an issue essential to “the truth of the gospel” (vs. 14). Action must be taken to affirm the truth that no one is “justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we [who] have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law” (vs. 16).

The protection of the unity of the Church is our moral and spiritual obligation. Let us always bear in mind that we are united to one another because we are forever one in Christ.

O holy apostles, intercede with the merciful God to save us and unite us in Himself. – From the Festal Hymn for an Apostle