

November 1 - Friday of the Nineteenth Week after Pentecost
Philippians 1:27-2:4

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

November 2 - Saturday of the Nineteenth Week after Pentecost
1 Corinthians 15:58-16:3

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

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

Of equal importance, in today’s reading Saint Paul teaches about two of God’s purposes for money. The apostle’s emphasis on sharing among the faithful (Rom 15:27) directs us to the first of God’s purposes for money: wealth should be used to strengthen fellowship among the brethren. By His self-offering in Christ, God purified “for Himself His own special people zealous for good works” (Ti 2:14). Among those works, in particular, is “distributing to the needs of the saints” (Rom 12:13).

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

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

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

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

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

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

November 3 – Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost
2 Corinthians 11:31-12:9

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

November 4 – Monday of the Twentieth Week after Pentecost
Philippians 2:12-15

Apostolic Admonitions – Work Out Your Salvation: *Philippians 2:12-15, especially vs. 12:*

“Therefore, my beloved . . . work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. . . .” The present passage continues our readings through Philippians – the Apostle Paul’s letter of appreciation to the Christians at Philippi. Saint Paul received financial aid from them for his personal maintenance while in custody awaiting trial. However, being a good father in Christ, he also takes an opportunity to counsel his beloved congregation concerning their salvation.

As the apostle begins his discussion, he uses a classical means of stating truth through the use of opposites. First he says, “Work out your own salvation” and then, although he seems to contradict himself, insists that “it is God who works in you” (vss. 12, 13). In actuality, he is demonstrating the fullness of the truth concerning our struggle for salvation.

It is useless for us to try to establish who accomplishes the work of salvation, for the apostle speaks as if *both* God and the Philippians are responsible for their deliverance. In fact, these seeming opposites constitute the fully balanced truth: salvation is a process wherein the relationship of God and man is synergistic. Each person works out his or her salvation while God, quietly and firmly, works with us, encouraging, illumining, and filling us with His grace (vs. 13).

We the faithful know full well that the good will of the Holy Trinity yokes us to Christ in the work of salvation. We never struggle alone! We are called into unity with Christ to defeat the demonic powers that divide us from one another. Thus, in the Divine Liturgy, we pray for the revelation of the entire Body of Christ, asking for the descent of the Holy Spirit upon ourselves and upon His gifts now set forth on the Holy Table.

We work at our personal salvation “with fear and trembling” (vs. 12) because deliverance is a treasured gift from God. We stand in awe of the God who works along with us to save us, for to deliver us is “His good pleasure” (vs. 13).

It is important to emphasize that salvation is not a solo task we carry out before God. We are children in the family of our Father in heaven. There is a great potential for joy in being members of one another, united under one Head in the Body of Christ.

Hence, the salvation of everyone is the concern of the faithful individually. Just as white corpuscles rush to a point of infection inside our bloodstream, so should the prayers of Christians hasten to the Lord on behalf of their brethren in Christ who are in need.

Note that the apostle does not speak of such mutual concern in generalities. Rather, he teaches that we must “do all things without complaining and disputing” (vs. 14). Looking ahead in Philippians, we find Saint Paul using a specific situation to address the need for corporate salvation. He implores “Euodia . . . and Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord” (vs. 4:2), while insisting that all must “help these women who labored with me in the gospel” (vs. 4:3).

Not only is our individual salvation linked to the salvation of our fellow Christians, but salvation, by its nature, also requires concern for those for whom we are to “shine as lights in the world” (vs. 12:15) – those still outside the Christian community. Indeed, in this dark world, we find multitudes of people still groping for meaning amidst hatred, violence, or fruitless pleasures.

Let us “become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation” (vs. 15). The apostle uses the word “become” to indicate salvation as a mutual and ongoing work of cleansing ourselves of everything that would prevent us from being *lights in the world*.

O Good One, accept whatever good will is in us and send yet more measures of strength.
– Saint Ephraim the Syrian

November 5 – Tuesday of the Twentieth Week after Pentecost
Philippians 2:16-23

Apostolic Admonitions, continued – Care for the Brethren: *Philippians 2:17-23, especially vs. 20*: “*For I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state.*” This epistle was hand-carried by Epaphroditus, the courier who only recently had brought financial help from Philippi to the apostle (vs. 25). Now, the apostle informs the Philippians that, “as soon as I see how it goes with me” (vs. 23), he will send Timothy to them – not only to supply information about the apostle’s case, but so he can return and encourage him, “when I know your state” (vs. 19). He adds: “I trust in the Lord that I myself shall also come shortly” (vs. 24).

Reading between the lines, we see strong mutual concern manifested in these comments. Saint Paul not only voices his concerns verbally, but also alludes to forms of tangible care for the family of faith: financial aid, couriers covering long distances, personal visits. As we examine today’s reading, let us be alert to the kind of concern shared by true brethren in the faith. The apostle admonishes us to love not only in words and precepts, but by tangible action. If we are to care for our fellow Christians, we must offer our own “blood, and sweat, and tears, and toil,” to use the words of Winston Churchill. The apostle employs the image of a libation (vs. 17) to transform his personal struggles into an offering to God on behalf of the Philippians.

In the ancient world libations, or drink offerings, called for wine, oil, or some precious liquid to be poured out to God (see Nm 28:7). We see an example of this practice in the call of Gideon (Jgs 6:19-20). A libation surrenders to God something from the very best staples of life. It symbolizes giving the best of oneself to the Lord, without reservation or holding back (Mal 1:7-8). Like holocaust offerings, libations were poured out seemingly in “utter waste,” at least to the eye of the disinterested observer (Mk 14:3-5).

To conceive of one’s entire life as a libation, an unrestrained “pouring out” to God on behalf others, runs completely counter to our consumer culture. The world tells us to indulge ourselves. You deserve the best, satisfy your cravings – you are worth it!

In self-offering, however, we find the essence of the gospel. When Gideon understood what the Lord was asking and resolved in his heart to serve God, he says: “If now I have found mercy in Your sight then You shall do everything for me today. . . . Do not leave here, I pray, until I come to You and I will bring out my offering” (Jgs 6:17-18).

Likewise, Saint Paul commits everything to God. “I am glad and rejoice with you all. For the same reason you also be glad and rejoice with me” (Phil 2:17-18). We are to offer our own lives in this manner, whether it be in service to the Church, to our children or elderly parents, or in our struggles with pain and illness – in everything life brings. If we commit everything to God, then our life can be offered as a libation of love.

True caring for others is always personal. The Philippians send Epaphroditus. The apostle will send Timothy, who served him like a son (vs. 22) and, if possible, he will go to Philippi himself (vs. 24). When we speak of “hands on” care, then, we mean more than verbalized love: it implies direct, immediate service on behalf of the other.

To show his true care for the disciples at Philippi, Saint Paul plans to send Timothy because “I have no one like-minded who will sincerely care for your state” (vs. 20). In Greek, the phrase is “like-souled,” implying mind, emotions and will. Saint John Chrysostom says: “This then is that like-mindedness, to love the disciples as the Master loves them” unrestrainedly (“Homily 9 on Philippians,” *NPNF First Series*, Vol. 13, p. 224.)

O Lord, grant us to serve Thy people as unto Thee alone, with pure hearts and minds.

November 6 - Wednesday of the Twentieth Week after Pentecost
Philippians 2:24-30

Apostolic Admonitions, continued – Receive the Lord’s Workers: *Philippians 2:24-30, especially vs. 29*: “Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness, and hold such men in esteem.” Saint Paul’s messenger to the Philippian faithful was Epaphroditus, a member the congregation at Philippi and a man whom the apostle readily calls “my brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier . . . the one who ministered to my need” (vs. 25). The apostle urges the Philippians to receive Epaphroditus and to esteem all workers like him (vs. 29): persons of loyalty (vs. 25), compassion (vs. 26), and self-sacrifice (vs. 30).

We, too, are called to receive and esteem workers like Epaphroditus – the loyal and faithful servants who carry out their labors for the Lord day in and day out, week by week, year after year. Consider how Epaphroditus bore the monetary gift of the Philippian congregation on foot, walking all the way from the middle of northern Greece to the Adriatic. He then crossed by ferry to Brundisium (Brindisi, on the east coast of Italy) and traveled the Italian peninsula to Rome. With these tangible efforts, he ministered to St. Paul in his “need” (vs. 25).

Often, the Lord’s most loyal and dutiful servants and handmaids are taken for granted because they minister quietly, without calling attention to themselves. We can all recall someone who belongs to the ranks of the overlooked. Perhaps it is a single mother who comes regularly to the Divine Liturgy with her children scrubbed, dressed, and schooled to be respectful of the Lord, or an honest shopkeeper who always stands behind his goods, services, and customer needs. There is the retiree who oversees the altar servers and sweeps the narthex, or secretaries who answer the mail and keep the church running.

Although not every person fulfills a leadership task, or one designated as service or “work” for the Church, each one serves the Lord in the position that has been granted to him in this life. Thus they are worthy of honor.

Let us also esteem those who are compassionate like Epaphroditus, who “for the work of Christ . . . came close to death, not regarding his life, to supply what was lacking” to the Apostle Paul (vs. 30). When he learned that his fellow Christians at Philippi were concerned for him, because they “heard that he was sick,” Epaphroditus is further distressed by their worries on his behalf (vs. 26). We have pastors who night and day respond to requests for prayers, counsel, and support. God bless those who hear the confessions of their people with compassion, sharing Christ’s love and send penitents away with “no further care” for the sins they have confessed. Indeed, the Lord blesses every Christian who consoles, listens, brings a dish of food to one in need, or simply smiles to give encouragement.

Finally, following Epaphroditus’ example, let us receive and esteem those who willingly extend themselves for others at risk of life and limb, or their own financial resources: the self-giving saints of God.

A beloved deacon in Indiana was working as a paramedic when he was injured in his wrecked ambulance. Paralyzed, he nevertheless instructed the relief workers on how to tend the other victims.

Only after he was sure that everyone else was cared for did he tell those at the scene about his own injuries. Afterward, through the long months following the accident, and before he lost the battle for his life, this man ever considered others around him before himself.

O ye holy saints, who have fought the good fight and kept the faith, pray for us! – Archimandrite Sophrony Sakharov

November 7 – Thursday of the Twentieth Week after Pentecost
Philippians 3:1-8

Apostolic Admonitions continued, – Rejoice and Beware: *Philippians 3:1-8, especially vss. 1- 2:* “Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. . . . Beware of dogs; beware of evil workers; beware of the mutilation!” When an army retreats before enemy forces, it often lays traps and mines to impede the progress of its pursuers. The advancing forces are forced to send special teams ahead to detect and destroy these landmines and improvised explosive devices if they wish to create corridors through which their units may pass unharmed.

The teams that open these safe corridors carefully mark out the secured passages, to prevent the troops that follow from stepping into danger. This image of a safe, clear path lined by death on either side typifies our spiritual journey.

We rejoice always “in the Lord,” knowing that He is the sole Way, for in Him each one “is safe” (vs. 1). Still, we remain keenly aware of the potential for mutilation and injury that lies alongside the edge of the “narrow . . . way, which leads to life” (Mt 7:14). Hidden “dogs” and “evil workers” oppose us, intending to do us harm (Phil 3:2).

The *evil workers* who subvert the Apostle Paul’s ministry are fellow Christians who insist on circumcision as well as baptism for converts to the faith. They endorse this practice because they consider the Christian faith an extension of Judaism. As they travel the circuit of Gentile churches planted by Saint Paul, they teach that his gospel is incomplete and promote their own message as the fullness of the faith.

The apostle, meanwhile, is imprisoned and unable to counter such false teaching in person. Already, an apostolic council at Jerusalem has repudiated circumcision for Gentile converts (see Acts 15), affirming instead a Spirit-based interpretation of the Mosaic Law.

Hence, the Apostle Paul writes to the Philippians: “For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence” in rites performed on the flesh to signify membership in the true Israel (Phil 3:3).

Such “confidence in the flesh” (vs. 3) continues to be a temptation for the faithful. Saint Paul’s message to the Philippians to “worship God in the Spirit, [and] rejoice in Christ Jesus” (vs. 3) is echoed by Saint Seraphim of Sarov many centuries later. Although circumstances change, the truth taught by the Church does not.

“Prayer, fasting, vigil and all other Christian activities, however good they may be in themselves, do not constitute the aim of our Christian life, although they serve as the indispensable means of reaching this end,” observes Saint Seraphim. “The true aim of our Christian life consists in the acquisition of the Holy Spirit of God. . . .

“Only the good deed done for Christ’s sake brings us the fruits of the Holy Spirit. . . . God’s all-saving will consists in doing good solely to acquire the Holy Spirit as an eternal, inexhaustible treasure which cannot be rightly valued” (*Little Russian Philokalia*, vol. 1, p. 86, 89).

It is Christ who saves us, not circumcision or good deeds. Our works are done solely to “gain Christ” (vs. 8). The Lord Jesus gives the strength to do His will. All else is “counted loss for Christ. . . for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord” (vss. 7-8).

Saint Paul holds up his own life as an example to refute the appeal to good works: “I also might have confidence in the flesh,” being “circumcised on the eighth day” as the Law requires (vs. 4). Although this ritual secured him as a Jew “of the stock of Israel” (vs. 4), he now counts every such mark and achievement “as rubbish” (vs. 8), for now he knows Christ the Lord.

O Lord Jesus, our Savior, who didst send down the gift of Thy most Holy Spirit, make us to be servants of Thy holy mysteries by the same Spirit, and have mercy on us.

– Archimandrite Sophrony Sakharov

November 8 - Friday of the Twentieth Week after Pentecost
Philippians 3:8-19

Apostolic Admonitions, continued – Follow My Example: *Philippians 3:8-19, especially vs. 17:* “Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern.” In Philippians, Saint Paul admonishes us to follow the example of his life (vss. 15-18). Of course, we cannot “walk” according to the apostle’s pattern unless we are aided by the Holy Spirit – and unless we embrace the same aims and commitments.

What choices did Saint Paul make that determined his life? In this passage, he reveals ten assumptions that direct his life (vss. 8-14). Note how completely the foundation of the apostle’s life is centered on Christ!

“I . . . count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord” (vs. 8). Everything we value in life – our other relationships, achievements, heritage, education, conduct — pales before our commitment to Christ Jesus. He exceeds every desire and goal of this world.

“I have suffered the loss of all things . . . that I may gain Christ” (vs. 8). The Church Fathers teach us that we will grow through repentance, purification, and enlightenment into ever greater unity with the Lord Jesus. Ultimately, by His grace, we may attain to what He is by nature. Theosis (deification) is the goal of that lifelong work by which we “gain Christ.”

“That I may . . . be found in Him” (vss. 8-9). Will we be “found in Christ” when we stand before His dread Judgment Seat, or still in Adam? There is only one “good defense” we can offer: that of “not having my own righteousness . . . but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith” (vs. 9).

“That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection” (vs. 10). Elsewhere, Saint Paul says, “And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty” (1 Cor 15:14). Indeed Christ is risen! We know and receive and even partake of Him.

“That I may know . . . the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death” (Phil 3:10). Remember these words: “Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me” (Mk 8:34). Our desires, our will, and our private ways must be placed on the cross now, in this life, or we shall have no fellowship with Him.

“I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me” (Phil 3:12). A lifeguard lays hold of a drowning man, and that man holds tightly to his savior.

“I do not count myself to have apprehended” (vs. 13). Note the apostle’s humility. As we grow into and toward Christ, we grow away from our prideful self. The work required of us is lifelong, and thus the apostle urges us to “press on” (vs. 12).

“One thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind” (vs. 13). Here Saint Paul reminds us to forget the past, for “neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified . . . in the name of the Lord Jesus” (1 Cor 6:9-11).

“Reaching forward to those things which are ahead” (Phil 3:13) means that we seek wisdom and growth in divine grace, and the attainment of God’s kingdom.

“I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (vs. 14). “The King will say to those at His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world’” (Mt 25:34). Indeed, press on!

Appear to us, O Light of the world, that we may become children of Thine undying Light. –
Archimandrite Sophrony Sakharov

November 9 - Saturday of the Twentieth Week after Pentecost
2 Corinthians 1:8-11

By Your Prayers: 2 Corinthians 1:8-11, especially vss. 9-11: “God who raises the dead . . . delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us, you also helping together in prayer for us. . . .” A pious custom among Orthodox Christians is to utter the saying “by your prayers.” If someone says to us, “Have a wonderful trip,” for example, these words form an appropriate reply.

They signal our agreement in the hope our friend expresses, but also our acceptance of our dependency on God, our recognition of the need for prayer, and a request for our friend’s prayers in particular. How much is packed into these three words! And note how well they describe Saint Paul’s message to the Corinthians in the today’s passage.

In this epistle, Saint Paul alludes to experiences already familiar to his Corinthian readers, but unknown to us today. We have the text of his letter, but no other information concerning the events to which he refers.

For example, Saint Paul alludes to the “trouble which came to us in Asia” (vs. 8). The Greek word *thlipsis* may be translated as “trouble,” “affliction,” “distress,” “pressure,” or “trial,” but it gives us no concrete idea of the nature of the apostle’s difficulty. He speaks of feeling despair “even of life” (vs. 8), of the “sentence of death” (vs. 9), and deliverance “from so great a death” (vs. 10), yet we are puzzled as to the specifics.

Was he speaking of serious illness, violent persecution, arrest, or trial with the possibility of a death sentence? We simply cannot be sure, except to say it was serious and life-threatening. However, we do not need to know all the details. What matters is that the trouble was sufficiently threatening to inspire his prayers to God, and for him to seek the prayers of his fellow Christians. His message is pertinent for every disciple, and timely for every difficulty.

The apostle reminds us to look upon every such “close call” as a prompting to give thanks to God, “who delivered us from so great a death” (vs. 10). Even coming near to death may be considered a gift from God if it awakens us to the threat of eternal spiritual death.

Even when we are sensitive to the assaults of pain and death, the Lord reminds us to “seek first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness” (Mt 6:33), and to fear “Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (vs. 10:28). According to Saint Nikolai of Zicha, we can kill the soul by if we pamper the body, allowing it to occupy “itself with love for worldly riches,” or if we “[steal] the time, care or toil that you should devote to the soul and [give] them to the body” (Homilies, Vol. 2, p. 120). How frankly Saint Paul admits his dependency on God for his deliverance (2 Cor 1:9-10)! Every Christian ought to affirm that our deliverance from the trials of this life is a grace from God. In fact, God’s grace – together with our prayers and those of fellow Christians – has great bearing on our eternal salvation, as well as our safety in this present life.

The threat of death – both physical and spiritual – is ever near. Death should impel us to pray for ourselves and also to seek the prayers of others who appreciate our turmoil.

We turn first to God, “whom we trust that He will still deliver us” (vs. 10). We then offer pleas to the saints, who surely have the Lord’s ear, and to the Theotokos, the Mother of our God. Finally, we seek concerted help “together in prayer” (vs. 11) from friends strong in faith. Indeed, we heed Saint Paul and welcome the support of godly prayers from all our true partners in the faith.

By the prayers of the glorious Theotokos and of all Thy saints, guard our life, O Lord.

November 10 - Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost
Galatians 1:11-19

Facing the Lord: Galatians 1:11-19, especially vss. 15-16: “It pleased God . . . to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles. . . .” Note how the Apostle Paul refers here to his conversion, described in Acts 9:1-8. According to Saint John Chrysostom, “He was richly endowed with the Spirit . . . the revelation had enlightened his whole soul, and . . . he had Christ speaking within him” (“Homily 1 on Galatians,” *NPNF* First Series, Vol. 13, p. 11).

To come face to face with the living God, however that occurs, is a humbling, wondrous, life-changing experience. In Holy Scripture we find many reports of men and women who met the Lord and found their lives forever changed. In Saint Paul’s case, a face-to-face confrontation with God enlightened his inner being and illumined the darkness of his hatred and self-righteousness. God changed Saul of Tarsus from a mere man into a holy apostle. After his baptism, Saint Paul withdrew into Arabia and avoided the centers of Christian activity. He had faced the Lord Jesus, and he needed time to assimilate all that had changed within himself.

We may compare Saint Paul’s encounter with the Lord to the experiences of others who faced Christ. Some chose to follow the Lord Jesus, while others were sought out by him. Speaking of the Twelve, Saint Mark says that Christ “called to Him those He Himself wanted. And they came to Him. Then He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might send them out” (Mk 3:13-14).

Saint Paul calls himself “one born out of due time” (1 Cor 15:8), and yet he shared the experience of being called by the Lord Jesus. None of the other apostles seems to have experienced quite so cataclysmic a reversal of life as did Saint Paul. And yet each one came face to face with the Lord, the living God, which brought an entirely new orientation to his life.

The Twelve could speak of “that . . . which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life – the life was manifested, and we have seen” (1 Jn 1:1-2). They knew the Lord tangibly, including direct physical contact.

Saint Paul’s conversion is especially significant because he, like us, did not meet the Lord Jesus “in the flesh.” Saint Paul did not face Christ in this manner, nor do we (although the mystery of holy communion is a direct mystical encounter).

The apostle’s meeting with the Lord was not governed by sensory impressions, although he did hear a voice and see a light (Acts 26:13-14). Primarily, the Lord acted within his heart and soul (vs. 16). The Church prays: “Illumine our hearts, O Master. Open the eyes of our *nous*. Implant in us Thy blessed commandments. Come and dwell in us and cleanse us.”

Even those who knew the Lord “according to the flesh” (2 Cor 5:16) discovered that their “inner eye” saw much more than their physical eye. The Lord tells the Apostle Peter, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven” (Mt 16:17).

We, too, can meet Him who is wondrous, humbling, and transforming. Saint Paul teaches that “He is not very far from each one of us” (Acts 17:27). Let us seek Him, crying out to Him, praying and waiting for Him. He took on our flesh so that we might know Him and cry, “Lord, save me and have mercy.”

O Lord, appear to us sinners out of the multitude of Thy mercies and save our souls. – Vespers for the Feast of Theophany

November 11 - Monday of the Twenty-first Week after Pentecost
Philippians 4:10-23

The Joyous Apostle: *Philippians 4:10-23, especially vs. 10:* “*I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again. . . .*” Saint Paul is a joyful man who rejoices because the Lord enables him to cope with all things (vs. 13), because the Philippians care for him (vs. 10), and because he knows God will supply their every need out of His limitless riches (vs. 19). Joy is a characteristic of everyone who lives in Christ as fully as the Apostle Paul. If we desire that true joy to become our own, we will read today’s verses carefully to discern the inner source of the saint’s joyfulness.

Such a reading reveals that Saint Paul’s joy comes from his being infused with strength from the Lord Jesus – a strength sufficient for him to handle everything life brings him (vs. 13). In the original Greek, the apostle adds a prefix to the root word “strengthen” to indicate that the Lord is the One who puts this strength in him – who literally infuses him with strength.

As a result of the Lord Jesus filling the apostle with divine power, Saint Paul is content in whatever state he finds himself (vs. 11). The word “contentment” (*autarkia*) was popular among the Stoic philosophers for expressing the virtue of self-sufficiency.

However, Saint Paul knows that his sufficiency has its source in the Lord who fills him with strength. He knows he is not *self*-sufficient, but able to manage his present state only because of the power that God places in His faithful ones, regardless of whether they are in dire straits or well-furnished with life’s necessities (vss. 11-12)

Dwelling at all times in joy because he is strengthened by the Lord, the apostle speaks of rejoicing “greatly” at the signs of the Philippians’ concern, for they have once again sent relief on his behalf (vs. 10). On multiple occasions the Christian community at Philippi had ministered to him in his distress (vs. 14). They did so when he first evangelized them (vs. 1:5), and then on two other occasions: after he left to go to Thessalonica (vs. 4:16) and at another unspecified time (vs. 15). Besides those occasions, they had recently sent a gift via Epaphroditus (vs. 18).

Saint Paul’s joy at this generosity is not caused by what he received, although his needs are real and the help appreciated (vs. 14). He rejoices much more at the tangible evidence of the fruit abounding in God’s generous people.

The Philippians demonstrate that the same Lord who infuses the apostle with strength is empowering them in generosity. The “fruit” of the gospel by the Holy Spirit is “flourishing” in them (vss. 17, 10). What makes our beloved fathers and pastors happier than to see their sons and daughters in Christ visibly expressing true joy in the generous God and Lord of all?

The apostle’s rejoicing also wells up when he receives the Philippians’ gift, for he knows that God will supply all their needs in Christ – and gloriously so – out of His limitless divine riches (vs. 19).

By this same token, we know that the Lord’s hand is upon our lives. “When the Lord turned again the captivity of Sion, we became as men that are comforted. Then was our mouth filled with joy, and our tongue with rejoicing” (Ps 125:1-2).

When the apostle speaks of the Lord supplying the Philippians in their needs (Phil 4:19), he is speaking of more than material necessities. The greatest joy of our life in Christ comes when God works His miracles in our hearts and souls, supplying us with the graces of forgiveness, repentance, and the illumination of the Holy Spirit.

O Father of all mercies, receive our humble, joyous thanks for all that Thou has given us, but above all for Thine inestimable love in the salvation of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ. –General Thanksgiving, Book of Common Prayer

November 12 - Tuesday of the Twenty-first Week after Pentecost
Colossians 1:1-3, 7-11

A Worthy Walk: Colossians 1:1-3, 7-11, especially vs. 9-10: “We . . . do not cease to pray for you. . . . that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him. . . .” Today we begin a series of readings through the Epistle to the Colossians, in which the Apostle Paul teaches the disciples at Colossae how to apply the gospel to their daily lives. Throughout the letter, he emphasizes that the gospel is to be our foremost resource when choosing how to put the truth of God into action, resulting in a “walk worthy of the Lord” (vs. 10).

If we hear “the word of the truth of the gospel” (vs. 5) and know “the grace of God in truth” (vs. 6), we will naturally “love in the Spirit” (vs. 8). *Love in the Spirit* becomes visible when we live, speak, and “walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him” (vs. 10). Genuine truth translates into loving acts.

Epaphras reports on the Colossians’ love in the Spirit, prompting the Apostle to pray ceaselessly (vs. 9) that they might be “fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God” (vs. 10).

We may thus consider this love in the Spirit tantamount to a “worthy walk” – and yet, as members of Christ, we realize that such love exceeds all ordinary human love. For this reason the Apostle Paul qualifies his command to love with the phrase “in the Spirit.” Such love is beyond our capacity, unless we are strengthened and illumined by the Holy Spirit.

To *love in the Spirit of God* is to love as the Lord Jesus loves. We love even our enemies and are “kind to the unthankful and evil” (Lk 6:35). Loving in the Spirit describes Christ’s own walk among us. He “suffers long and is kind . . . does not envy . . . does not parade . . . is not puffed up . . . does not behave rudely, does not seek [His] own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things . . . [and] never fails” (1 Cor 13:4-8).

If we would walk worthily, we must love tangibly through the power of the Holy Spirit, in a manner beyond our corrupt human love. We are enabled to love by God, who fills us “with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding” (Col 1:9).

In the mystery of baptism, we are anointed with the oil of gladness “unto the healing of body and soul . . . that we [might] walk in the way of [God’s] commandments.” It is the Spirit of God who helps us put to death those sins that weigh us down and inhibit godly love within us.

A walk worthy of the Lord Jesus can be manifested in our lives and speech. But how does this come about? The living Lord works in our hearts by the power of the Holy Spirit, strengthening us with “all might according to His glorious power” (vs. 11).

This indwelling of the Spirit of God makes it possible for us to know God and to apply His will directly in our daily decisions and actions. In Saint Philaret’s “Prayer for the Beginning of the Day,” we plead for God to “help me in all things to rely upon Your holy will. In every hour of the day, reveal Your will to me.”

As God reveals His will, He also gives us His grace with “all might according to His glorious power” (vs. 11). He makes it possible for us to live truly and to increase “in the knowledge of God” (vs. 10).

When we “walk worthy of the Lord” (vs. 10), we do not turn away from borrowers (Mt 5:42); we love our enemies and pray for those who spitefully use us (Mt 5:44) we depend solely on “the grace of God in truth” (Col 1:6). We rejoice, knowing that Christ’s apostle does “not cease to pray for [us]” (vs. 9). O Holy Apostle Paul, intercede with the merciful God!

O Heavenly King, Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, who art everywhere present and fillest all things, come and dwell in us and cleanse us of every stain and save us, O Good One.

**November 13 - November 13 – Repose of Saint John Chrysostom
Hebrews 7:26-8:3**

Saint John's Choice: *Hebrews 7:26-8:3, especially vs 28:* “For the law appoints as high priests men who have weakness, but the word of the oath, which came after the law, appoints the Son who has been perfected forever.” The Apostle contrasts the High Priests of the Old Covenant with Christ the High Priest of the New Covenant, and he directs our attention to the significance of having this greater High Priest: “We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens” (vs 1). He points out that “such a High Priest was fitting for us” (vs 26). Understand, then, that Christ our High Priest was given to us that we should adopt a heavenly purpose of insuperable benefit. The Prophet Isaiah foresaw the great gift that would come in Christ Jesus when he said, “A pure way shall be there, and it shall be called a holy way....But those dispersed shall walk in it, and they shall not go astray” (Is. 35:8). The Way is Christ (as He Himself said), so that we need not go astray.

Saint John Chrysostom, whose Feast we celebrate today, also urges walking in the true Way, encouraging us by the example of his own life. Christ *defines* the way, being “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and...higher than the heavens” (vs 26), Who “once for all...offered up Himself” (vs 27), Who is “perfected forever” (vs 28), and Who “is seated at the right hand...of the Majesty” (vs 1), “a Minister of the sanctuary...which the Lord erected” (vs 2). Saint John exemplifies the Way, urging us to “trust in the Lord that you have winged your souls for heaven, that you have removed from earth, that being in the world ye handle not the things of the world.” Compare his life with Christ's, and be encouraged!

As to being holy, Saint John is clear: “‘holy’ has not force to give the same meaning in every case to which it is applied; since God is called ‘Holy,’ though not as we are.” Yet we may call John “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners,” because, as his biographer J. N. D. Kelley says, “his conduct [as a young man] seems to have been exemplary since in later life his detractors were unable, in spite of energetically raking over his past, to discover any youthful misdemeanors.” And we have every reason to follow his example now at whatever age we find ourselves, for through his whole life he followed the heavenly way.

When he graduated from his early education, the young John suddenly changed his course in life, “turned his back on a secular career...abandoned ordinary social life in favor of the life of tranquility....and applied himself to bible study and to making frequent visits to church for prayer.” He thus “once for all...offered up” (vs 27) himself to the Lord Whom he chose to follow, soon being Baptized and entering into a brotherhood of fellow aspirants of the Way. So much depends on our making right and free choices - if we would rise above our weaknesses.

Following his Lord's path, the young convert, John, also was “perfected” (vs 28) through association with and guidance by his own Bishop, Meletios, and by another visiting Bishop, Diodore of Tarsos. At this juncture, John again chose a difficult path, life as a monk, living apart in the mountains - all for the purpose of gaining ever greater control over his passions. Later, choosing to end his isolation, he returned to Antioch, received ordination as a Deacon and then as a Priest, “but continued...to practice his routine of monastic austerities.”

We do not necessarily need to become monastics, but every day we need to make the hard choices the Lord asks of us. Christ's Way to life is opened to all the faithful if we will heed Saint John's example and strive toward the goal of standing “at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty” (vs 1). May we begin today!

Enlighten the eyes of my understanding and help me to do Thy will from my heart.

November 14 - Thursday of the Twenty-first Week after Pentecost
Colossians 1:24-29

Fulfillment in Christ: *Colossians 1:24-29, especially vs. 28:* “Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.” In the pre-communion prayers we admit two truths: first, that our Lord Jesus Christ is present in the holy gifts, and second, that our souls and bodies are incomplete, sinful, and unworthy of Him. After stating our belief “that this is truly Thine own immaculate Body, and that this is truly Thine own precious Blood,” we plead with God to make us “worthy to partake without condemnation of Thine immaculate Mysteries . . . unto forgiveness of sins and life everlasting.”

We confess that the Lord Jesus can fulfill, restore, heal, forgive, and perfect us. He is the One who truly desires our perfect fulfillment. There are many persons and events through which we experience fulfillment in this present life, yet we know that every human being and every material thing eventually dims, tarnishes, and perishes. However, when we come to Jesus for fulfillment, we approach what is eternal and complete, having “the hope of glory” (vs. 27). We anticipate the realization in ourselves of the perfection that is in Him (vs. 28).

The Apostle Paul’s focus in this present reading is on the fulfillment which is in Christ. As Saint Paul writes to the Colossians, he is enduring sufferings to “fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ” (vs. 24). Fulfilling “the word of God” is his sole reason for preaching the gospel (vs. 25).

He seeks the “hope of glory” (vs. 27) for the Gentiles – the mystery “hidden from ages” (vs. 26), but now known – so that they might be fulfilled. Saint Paul labors to “present every man perfect [completed] in Christ Jesus” (vs. 28).

Note the apostle’s assertion that this fulfillment is realized in the faithful only through suffering. The apostle includes here his own suffering (vs. 24). The chalice that we approach is a cup of suffering: “For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes” (1 Cor 11:26). We have the Lord Jesus’ word that anyone who would come after Him must daily take up his cross (Lk 9:23).

Indeed, the whole of Orthodox tradition is a call to suffering. The apostles and Church Fathers elevate the sufferings of the faithful and identify them with the Lord’s suffering (Col 1:24). Christ, in turn, identifies Himself with the faithful who are being jailed and martyred, for He tells Saul of Tarsus: “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting” (Acts 9:5).

Furthermore, the warning that Saint Paul gives in this passage states that in order to reach “this end” (Col 1:29) we must pass through laboring and striving. The Apostle’s remarks are echoed by Saint John Climacus: “Keep a firm hold of the blessed gladdening sorrow of holy compunction, and do not stop working at it until it raises you high above the things of this world, and presents you pure to Christ” (*Ladder of Divine Ascent* 7.9, p. 71).

However, complete fulfillment is not a goal we achieve solely by our labor and striving, necessary as these may be. Only the word of God achieves the fulfillment taught by the apostles (vs. 25).

Let us then approach holy communion with a deep need and longing for Christ’s fulfillment, for that ultimate mystery “which is Christ in you” (vs. 27). The Lord’s presence within fulfills and completes us. If we come to Him humbly and ask Him for fulfillment, He will make us “perfect in Christ Jesus” (vs. 28).

Thou alone, Good Lord, art the sanctification and splendor of our souls. – Post-communion Prayer of Saint Simeon the Translator

November 15 - Friday of the Twenty-first Week after Pentecost
Colossians 2:1-7

A True Walk: Colossians 2:1-7, especially vs. 6: “As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him.” Our Lord Jesus Christ asks us to rely upon Him and live for Him – to “walk in Him,” if we would use biblical language. In the second chapter of Saint Paul’s Epistle to the Colossians, we may identify seven ways for achieving a true walk in the Lord.

“Being knit together in love” (vs. 2): The “mystery of God, of the Father and of Christ” reveals God to *be* love. In Christ, everyone we meet in the Church is someone the Lord calls upon us to love. Naturally, being *knit together* with persons who are friendly and kind to us is more attractive than associating with those who are spiteful, withdrawn, or difficult. Still, as servants of the Lord, we are asked to receive every member as a gift from God, through whom we learn how to be knit together in love even when we find it challenging.

“Attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding” (vs. 2): To live as one of Christ’s own is to journey into the heart of God (Mt 11:29). We hold a promise from the Lord that we will gain greater understanding of ourselves, the world, our fellow men, and Christ Himself, who created us. Yes, we grow through knowing Him who has exalted us above every other creature. As we come to know God, every personal encounter becomes a means of acquiring the *riches* of God’s eternal kingdom.

“Good order” (vs. 5): To walk in Christ is to participate in the life of His Body, to share in His Cross and Eucharist. Supporting the *good order* of God’s people is part of a true walk, while indifference to Church order is misguided, at best. The actual disruption of good order is an offense against God.

“Steadfastness of your faith in Christ” (vs. 5): Steadfastness is basic to achieving a true walk. Note how the apostle explicitly connects it to the Lord Jesus. To walk truly, we have to maintain trust in Christ. As we struggle to love unlovable people, keep good order in our communities, and live in the world, many things will assault our faith and try to tear it down, wear it away, and inhibit our trust in God our Savior.

So, whenever we observe our faith wavering, let us confess our struggle to the Lord and seek the counsel of our all-powerful Confessor. Above all, let us cry out, “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief” (Mk 9:24)! When we are not ashamed to admit that we are weak and plagued with doubt, we may yet hope to be “established in the faith” (Col 2:7) by the Spirit of Christ who dwells within us.

“Rooted and built up in Him” (vs. 7): These are two related ways of achieving a true walk in Christ. Speaking of the “true vine” and its branches (Jn 15:1), Christ emphasizes the need to abide and take root in Him. Rootedness and being *built up* in Him point to the importance of our grafting into the Lord; union is the way His life flows into ours.

Every Church Father teaches the necessity of prayer for sustaining and building up a healthy, life-giving relationship with the Lord Jesus. Prayer allows us to draw upon the very life of Christ. Let us pray to the Lord!

“Abounding in [the faith] with thanksgiving” (vs. 7): We note again that a true walk arises from our solid trust in the Lord. Trust sustains our relationship with Him. When we trust Him, we base our actions on His words. All the little risks we take to live this way produce in us thanksgiving to God for all things. “O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good” (Ps 135:1)!

Grant, O Lord, that we may walk in the way of Thy commandments all our days. – Prayer of Anointing during the Service of Baptism

November 16 - Saturday of the Twenty-first Week after Pentecost
2 Corinthians 3:12-18

Transformation: 2 Corinthians 3:12-18, especially vs. 16: *“Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.”* To appreciate the blessing that Saint Paul offers us in this passage, we may first wish to review Exodus 34:28-35. What is described in the latter passage is a type of Christ’s Transfiguration (Mt 17:1-8), but there are marked differences. Moses goes up Mount Horeb alone to speak to God (Ex 34:3), while Christ takes three disciples as witnesses when He ascends “a high mountain” (Mt 17:1). Moses’ face is glorified as he speaks with God (Ex 34:29); not only does Christ’s face shine, but His clothes also become “white as the light” (Mt 17:2).

Those with the Lord Jesus can hear the voice of God the Father, while Aaron and children of Israel below the mountain do not. In both cases, those who observe the changes – in Moses, in Christ – are frightened by the evidence of the divine presence (Ex 34:30; Mt 17:6).

Surely the encounter between Saul of Tarsus and the Lord Jesus on the road to Damascus, when Saul was an active enemy of the Christians (Acts 9:1-9), ought to be read alongside those passages from Exodus and Corinthians. For Christ confronts the future Saint Paul in so powerful and blinding a fashion that He transforms and redirects his life completely, taking away the veil (2 Cor 3:16). Saint Paul acquires hope and “great boldness of speech” (vs. 12) from his experience, empowering him to communicate forthrightly with us through the centuries. Likewise, Moses is commissioned to deliver the covenant to the people of Israel (Ex 34:27), which he does (vs. 35:1-40:32). Christ’s disciples are shown His glory “as far as they could bear it; so that when they would behold [Him] crucified . . . [they] would proclaim to the world that Thou art truly the radiance of the Father” (festal hymn of the Transfiguration).

The Apostle Paul’s message to us is born out of his direct experience. The fear of the Lord is natural to man, a reaction neither to be stifled nor extinguished. Godly fear is meant to restore us to the Lord and draw us to Him in reverence, not to alienate us from Him.

Whether the Lord God reveals Himself to us in moments of exaltation or those of biting pain and loss of hope, His brilliant radiance transforms, focuses, relieves, and restores hope in us. As with the children of Israel, once the covenant is fixed between us and God, it is established eternally. Saint Paul makes the point that the Old Testament, being divinely given, is neither wrong nor time-bound. What it lacks is the basic revelation that “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself” (2 Cor 5:19). Moses, however, has to use a veil, lest the radiance from his face discourage or impede faith in Israel (2 Cor 3:13).

Loss of faith and conviction should not plague us, for the veiling of divinity is removed “in Christ” (vs. 14) unless we choose to turn away. When we turn to the Lord, the impenetrable veil hiding God is removed. We are not kept from God; rather, He is near to every one of us.

We are reassured by the “the Spirit of the Lord” within us that brings *liberty* from fear (vs. 17). We are “no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God” (Eph 2:19). The Church is our home, and Christ is among us.

Indeed, God is with us – a truth sealed by the gift of the Holy Spirit. When we look at the icon of Christ, we discover a wonderful change taking place in us. We “are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor 3:18). Christ asks only that we seek repentance, joining ourselves with Him in the struggle for perfection so that we may become whole, as He is.

Save us, O Son of God, who wast transfigured on Mount Tabor. – Verse for the Feast of the Transfiguration

November 17 - Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost
Galatians 2:16-20

The Life in 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.”* For many years the Archpriest John Ilytch Sergieff, later known as Saint John of Kronstadt, kept a journal of the “edifying thoughts and feelings that came to [him].” Ultimately, these meditations were edited and published as *My Life in Christ*. Surely no text has done more to establish the expression “the life in Christ” in the English-speaking Orthodox world.

Today’s passage from Galatians offers us straightforward imagery of union with Christ: “It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me” (vs. 20). This statement echoes the Lord Jesus’ words, “Whoever lives . . . in Me shall never die” (Jn 11:26).

Along with the experience of the Church since the Lord’s Resurrection, these passages attest to the *life in Christ* as an endowment that exceeds every definition of “life” in this present existence. Such life is available to everyone who unites himself to Christ in holy baptism and submits to Him as King and God.

The Apostle Paul draws a parallel to the mystery of baptism in this passage. We recall that the candidate first renounces “Satan, and all his angels and all his works, and all his service, and all his pride.” As part of his parallel, Saint Paul asserts that all our works, when we follow the law, are corrupted the wiles of Satan and thus futile, “for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified” (Gal 2:16).

When the candidate unites himself “unto Christ,” he does so by “dying” to his former self. Saint Paul says he “died to the law that I might live to God” (vs. 19). Prayers are offered for the one just baptized, that “he may prove himself a child of the light, and an heir of eternal good things.” Saint Paul makes it clear that each of us must “now live in the flesh . . . by faith in the Son of God” (vs. 20). Our life in Christ must be lived out.

Saint Paul further asserts that living by external rules is futile (vs. 16). Only when we acknowledge that it is impossible to be justified before God do we actually find the gateway to the life in Christ, to the true faith “in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (vs. 20). According to Father Paul Tarazi, “This recognition of the necessity of faith is then the prologue to faith” (*Galatians: A Commentary*, p. 85). Once we grasp the limitations of living according to a set of rules, we become ready to “unite [our self] unto Christ” and receive life in Him.

Saint Paul emphasizes the basis for this hope: “The Son of God . . . loved me and gave Himself for me” (vs. 20). Thus, the Apostle reminds us that the love of God is “the origin of everything that brings about our salvation” (Tarazi, p. 89). Life in Christ requires us every day, at every hour, in every circumstance and relationship, to love in the same manner that Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us (vs. 20). Once we recognize this, we understand our need to rely on God’s forgiveness.

The Apostle Paul uses the verb “to live” in verses 19 and 20, reframing it to include a transitive action: to “live to God.” Thus, the life in Christ means that we behave as the Lord does; “I no longer live” means we give up our self for others; “Christ lives in me” reminds us to be His obedient servants. To “live in the flesh” requires us to embrace pain, toil, and struggle; to “live by faith” allows others to see the Son of God in us and through us.

O Lord, my God, may I ever remember Thy grace and henceforth live not unto myself, but unto Thee, our Benefactor, in the hope of eternal life and of unutterable joy. – Post-communion Prayers

November 18 - Monday of the Twenty-second Week after Pentecost
Colossians 2:13-20

Recall: Colossians 2:13-20, especially vs. 19: “[Hold] fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God.” The Church constantly reminds us of the riches of our membership in Christ by means of prayers, readings, and hymns. At vespers, orthros, and the Divine Liturgy, the Church recalls us to God – to the holy, consubstantial, and undivided Trinity and what He has done for us.

At vespers we pray: “O Lord . . . our God, who didst bow the heavens and come down for the salvation of mankind.” At orthros: “For lo, through the cross is joy come into all the world.” The liturgy reminds us: “Thou . . . didst come into the world to save sinners.” The consistent directive is for us to “recall!”

The unique quality of Orthodox worship takes what happened in the past and illumines these events with eternal light, inviting us to share in the Kingdom now. To “recall” involves not our memory alone, but our direct participation in the life of the eternal God. As we sing at Pascha, “Come ye, take light from the Light!”

If we consider the examples above, the salvation of mankind that is now, and the joy that the Cross effects, we see that, indeed, Christ is among us. The *recall* to eternal life here is no metaphor. This recall implies our participation; it is given to us by our Savior so we may draw from the source of life. We come to Him for healing, to find our way in the present darkness.

In today’s reading, the Apostle Paul employs this type of recall to awaken us to what Christ the Lifegiver offers us: “And you, being dead in your trespasses . . . He has made alive together with Him” (vs. 13).

Our relationship with God establishes a new Way, one with eternal possibility. Outside of Christ we are dead to God, although He desires no one’s death. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (Jn 3:16). Being alienated from God (whether by choice, training, or circumstance) is true death, because God is the Source of life. Life is His gift, allowing us to discern our pitiful condition and return to the Lifegiver, to participate in eternity.

We are made alive to God through union with Christ. At baptism we are asked: “Hast thou united thyself unto Christ?” That question remains pertinent, for our nature, unlike God’s, is changeable. Knowing that we are fickle, Saint Paul recalls how important it is for us to be “together with [Christ Jesus]” in whom we are forgiven our trespasses (Col 2:13).

Christ has “wiped out the handwriting of requirements . . . and . . . nailed it to the cross” (vs. 14). As we struggle to fulfill the holy law of God, our distance from Him becomes painfully obvious, for we are inclined to sin. We are enticed by that which we are told to avoid. We refuse what is good.

Saint Paul emphasizes such struggles throughout his epistles. The Law – “the handwriting of requirements” (vs. 14) – sets forth God’s high and holy standards. As we try to keep the Law, we find out how fallible we are. Saint Paul mourns with us, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23).

Saint Paul’s answer is to *recall* the Cross (vs. 14), on which our compassionate, man-befriending God embraced death, canceled the killing effects of the Law, and extended life to us. Christ Himself *recalls* us to life, if we hold fast to Him. Let us recall and partake of the Body of Christ, eating and drinking of Life. We are “nourished . . . with the increase that is from God” (vs. 19). Let us die and rise with Christ!

As the burning bush was not consumed, may I partake of the fire of thy life, O Christ. – Pre-communion Prayer of Saint Simeon the Translator

November 19 - Tuesday of the Twenty-second Week after Pentecost
Colossians 2:20-3:3

The Things Above: Colossians 2:20-3:3, especially vs. 3:1: *“If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.”* In the first verse of this passage, Saint Paul raises an issue that may be paraphrased as follows: “If you died with Christ in baptism, why then do you subject yourselves to the regulations, commandments, and doctrines of men?” Among the regulations he specifies are: “Do not touch; do not taste; do not handle” (vs. 21). To these he adds “self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body” (vs. 23).

A casual reading of this passage might lead us to conclude that the apostle opposes self-discipline and asceticism, which he certainly does not (see 2 Cor 11:7, 27). Furthermore, we know that Orthodox tradition, which is derived from the teachings of the apostles, highly values self-discipline, humility, and asceticism.

How, then, should we understand Apostle Paul’s apparent questioning of what we know as apostolic teaching? Read carefully, for Saint Paul is specifically repudiating practices he deems to be “of no value against the indulgence of the flesh” (vs. 23).

In other words, the apostle is reacting against the proposals of certain heretics who taught a dualistic worldview. These false teachers sought to replace our genuine union with Christ with ascetical and devotional practices. Saint Paul does not oppose asceticism, nor self-discipline, nor humility – only a misplaced reliance on those practices and rituals as ends in themselves.

Such practices have no power to control “fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry” (vs. 3:5). Any kind of discipline or asceticism is to be undertaken because the Spirit leads us to seek “those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God” (vs. 1) – because we desire to deepen our union with Christ.

Note how the Apostle Paul focuses on Christ, who gives life to every ascetical discipline and humility. Asceticism begins rightly from our participation in the holy mystery of baptism, wherein we “died with Christ” (vs. 2: 20), were “raised with Christ” (vs. 3:1), and find our “life . . . hidden with Christ in God” (vs. 3). The Lord Jesus, seated at the right hand of God, is the Lifegiver. Right discipline deepens and strengthens our life in Him.

According to Saint Seraphim of Sarov, “Prayer, fasting, vigil and all other Christian practices, however good they may be in themselves, do not constitute the aim of our Christian life, although they serve as the indispensable means of reaching this end. The true aim of our Christian life consists in the acquisition of the Holy Spirit of God. As for fasts, and vigils, and prayer, and almsgiving, and every good deed done for Christ’s sake, they are only means of acquiring the Holy Spirit of God” (*Little Russian Philokalia, Vol. 1, p. 86*).

What is the problem with a reliance on self-discipline (vs. 23)? Whatever is self-imposed does not derive from God. Rather, it arises from pride, with no intention to “put to death your members which are on earth” (vs. 5). “Self-imposed religion” encourages self-esteem and obstructs the Holy Spirit, who alone can lead us to true humility. Despite its similarity to life-giving Christian asceticism, the self-reliant approach is utterly contrary to apostolic teaching.

Let us, who have died with Christ and been raised with Him, seek life from Him alone. May we remember that Christ disparages outward displays of humility – “Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites. . . . For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting” (Mt 6:16) – and humble themselves in our hearts by setting our minds “on things above” (Col 3:2).

Open to me the door of repentance, O Lifegiver, for my soul goeth early to the temple of Thy holiness in the temple of my body, wholly polluted. – Lenten Verse

November 20 - Wednesday of the Twenty-second Week after Pentecost
Colossians 3:17-4:1

To Live Eucharistically: Colossians 3:17-4:1, especially vs. 17: “*And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.*” In this passage the Apostle Paul admonishes the faithful to give thanks to God in all things. We are to do everything with one precondition: let it be done in the Lord’s name, with praise and thanksgiving to God the Father.

After this initial charge, the apostle proceeds to issue a number of directives concerning our everyday relationships. In other words, Saint Paul raises up thanksgiving as the umbrella which covers husbands and wives, children and parents, employees and employers. He places these daily interactions in a “eucharistic” context, telling us to take every aspect of our lives, from the most exalted to the most mundane, and live it with praise and thanksgiving before God, offering *eucharist* (thanks) to Him.

“When man stands before the throne of God, when he has fulfilled all that God has given him to fulfill, when all sins are forgiven, all joy restored, then there is nothing else for him to do but to give thanks,” writes Father Alexander Schmemmann. “Eucharist (thanksgiving) is the state of perfect man. Eucharist is the life of paradise. Eucharist is the only full and real response of man to God’s creation, redemption, and gift of heaven” (*For the Life of the World*, pp. 37-38).

Indeed, eucharist is the life in Christ, honoring the kingdom of God in our everyday relationships with praise and thanksgiving. The prayer “Thy kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven” is fulfilled in eucharist. Let us consider Saint Paul’s directives in this light.

When wives and husbands perceive each other as God’s creation and gift, our natural response is to give thanks to the Lord. Our actions toward one another are shaped as God wills. Through eucharist, marriage partners discover the key to submitting their lives to each other “as to the Lord” (vs. 23).

When a spouse gives praise and thanksgiving to Christ, the Lord reveals Himself in and through that marriage. The attitude of eucharist reverses the alienating process described elsewhere by Saint Paul: “Although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened” (Rom 1:21).

By giving praise and thanks to God, our hearts are illumined. We show forth the Kingdom in our thoughts and actions. Bitterness departs, and love is facilitated (Col 3:19).

Infant baptism enables families to raise their children under this same umbrella of eucharist, both at home and in the eucharistic assembly of the Divine Liturgy. According to Theophan the Recluse, “The most effective means for the education of true taste in the heart is a church-centered life, in which all children in their upbringing must be unfailingly kept. Sympathy for everything sacred, pleasure in remaining in its midst for the sake of quietness and warmth . . . cannot better be imprinted in the heart than by a church-centered life” (*Raising Them Right*, p. 41).

Praise and thanksgiving should be our God-given norm and our constant in life. We will never discourage or provoke our children (vs. 21) if we truly “[give] thanks to God the Father through” our Lord Jesus Christ in all things (vs. 17).

Whenever we work together eucharistically, the relationship between employers and employees is transformed. If our work is performed eucharistically, “as to the Lord and not to men” (vs. 23), then all our efforts are vested in Christ. Any achievement is cause for thanksgiving and praise to God for what Christ alone achieves.

Let us commend ourselves, and each other, and all our life unto Christ our God.

– Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom

November 21 - November 21 – Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple Hebrews 9:1-7

Two Tabernacles: Hebrews 9:1-7, especially vss. 8-9: *“The first tabernacle . . . was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect. . . .”* In the days leading up to today’s feast, the Church sings: “Today the whole world is filled with gladness on the brilliant feast of the Theotokos, raising its voice and saying, ‘This is she who is the heavenly tabernacle.’” In the verses quoted above, the Apostle Paul speaks of the tabernacle in the wilderness, organized by Moses at the direction of God: “Also, you shall make Me a sanctuary, and I will appear among you” (Ex 25:8). This wilderness tabernacle was a type of the eternal, heavenly tabernacle; and now, in giving birth to God in the flesh, the Theotokos herself becomes the living House of God.

“Tabernacle” in the original Hebrew simply means “tent.” The apostle describes for us the three divisions within this sanctuary. First, there is a yard before the tabernacle proper, open to the elements, where God’s people gather. Behind a curtained entrance is a space inside the tent for the the priests and Levites, “in which was the lampstand, the table, and the showbread, which is called the sanctuary” or Holy Place (Heb 9:2). Finally, at the far end, demarcated by another curtain, is the Holiest of All (vs. 3).

This arrangement is reflected in the floor plan typical of many Orthodox churches, which has a narthex, nave, and altar. In early Christian times, the outer and inner narthex were separated from the nave by a door. The inner narthex provided worship space for catechumens, who were not yet baptized (thus the cry, “The doors, the doors”). The nave is where the faithful worship, while the holy altar, where the priest officiates behind the iconostasis, corresponds to the inmost area of the ancient tabernacle.

The ancient Holy of Holies contained “the golden censer and the ark of the covenant overlaid on all sides with gold, in which were the golden pot that had the manna, Aaron’s rod that budded, and the tablets of the covenant” (vs. 4). This most sacred space and its furnishings are treated with high reverence on the basis of a “theology of presence,” a language that enriches our magnification of the Theotokos as the ultimate tabernacle.

Through her, He who is comes and reveals Himself to the faithful. He who cannot be contained is pleased to dwell among men. Hence one name for the Virgin Mary is *Platytera*, “more spacious than the heavens,” for her womb contained God the Word, the uncontainable.

In Mosaic worship, smoke from the golden censer was offered by the High Priest to cover the mercy seat above the tables of testimony, and to protect the priest from death in the presence of God (Lv 16:13). Likewise, in humanity He receives from the Virgin Mary, Jesus the Great High Priest offers His life in order to defeat death and gain eternal life for us.

The Theotokos is often called the Ark, a reference to the Ark of the Covenant. We read that the original Ark held the golden pot of perishable manna. And yet the Virgin held Christ “the true bread from heaven. . . . He who comes down . . . and gives life to the world” (Jn 6:32-33). Aaron’s rod, also contained in the Ark, was made of wood from the almond tree. The Hebrew name for this tree means “waker,” for it is the first tree to blossom in spring. And from the Virgin Mary comes Jesus, the first blossom of the new life.

The tablets of the covenant, also in the Ark, were given by God to Moses. They contained God’s covenant with His people, literally called in Hebrew “the Ten Words.” Mary, as the Ark, holds Him who is the ultimate Covenant and eternal Word of God.

Let us extol Mary, whom the prophets foretold, the holy ark holding a jar, a rod, a tablet.
– Festal Hymn of the Entrance into the Temple

November 22 - Friday of the Twenty-second Week after Pentecost
Colossians 4:10-18

Laboring in Prayer: Colossians 4:10-18, especially vs. 12: “*Epaphras, who is one of you, a bondservant of Christ, greets you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.*” In Colossians, Saint Paul sets out several fundamentals concerning prayer – a practice essential for every disciple who seeks to fulfill the will of God. He declares: “We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you . . . that you may be filled with the knowledge of [God’s] will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding” (Col 1:3, 9).

“You cannot be called a Christian if you do not pray often,” declares Archimandrite Ioannikios Kotsonis. “All the saints prayed continually and with ardor. In vain is every spiritual building, every spiritual guard without the presence of the Lord; consequently, in vain is every work of ours without prayer. Prayer makes the presence of the Lord alive and changes every work, which could have been fruitless, into light and glory to the Heavenly Father” (*Themes from the Philokalia* Vol. 1, p. 48). Saint Paul offers Epaphras as an example to us of one who rightly and fervently “labors” in prayer. He inspires us to labor in like manner if we are to “stand perfect and complete” in God’s will (vs. 4:12). Note that he calls Epaphras a “bondservant” of Christ (vs. 12). The Greek word *doulos* can mean either servant or slave. It emphasizes Epaphras’ complete surrender of his life, fortune, desires, and will to the Lord.

Whatever this slave of God might have called his own he gladly surrendered to God, placing all in the hands of Christ Jesus, the Master. Saint Theophan the Recluse echoes the need to give Christ total control: “You must approach prayer with an attitude such that you desire only the Divine Will, and not your own, alike in asking and in receiving what you have asked for. . . . In a word, let it be in your mind and heart completely, to unite your will with the will of God, to obey it in everything, and in no way to desire to incline God’s will toward your own” (*Unseen Warfare*, p. 201).

Such absolute submission, in imitation of the servant or slave, is our precondition for effective prayer, for it destroys all forms of self-serving. A true Christian never prays to God as if the Lord were a bellhop, ready to respond to our fleeting desires.

Also, we must *struggle* in prayer. Saint Theophan continues, “You should always say your prayers with tireless diligence. . . . For humble patience, tirelessness, and persistence in prayer conquer the unconquerable God and incline Him to mercy” (p. 203).

“A firm beginning will certainly be useful for us when we later grow slack,” says Saint John Climacus. “A soul that is strong at first, but then relaxes, is spurred on by the memory of its former zeal. And in this way new wings are often obtained” (*Ladder of Divine Ascent* 1.11, p. 6).

Prayer will always entail a struggle between the self and its insatiable passions, likened by Saint John to “a greedy kitchen dog addicted to barking. . . . We have very evil, dangerous, cunning, and unscrupulous foes, who hold fire in their hands and try to burn the temple of God” – that is, our hearts and souls.

To give wings to our prayer we must have a “firm faith not only in God’s measureless bounty and in the immutable truth of His promise to hear us when we call to Him - even before our prayer is ended - but most of all in the power of the special dispensation of our Lord Jesus Christ” (*Unseen Warfare*, p. 203).

Fulfill, O Lord, the desires and petitions of Thy servants as may be most expedient for us. – Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom

November 23 – Saturday of the Twenty-second Week after Pentecost
2 Corinthians 5:1-10

The Resurrection Body: 2 Corinthians 5:1-10, especially vs. 1: “For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” In the Orthodox funeral service, Saint John of Damascus reminds us that although we are “fashioned after the image of God,” we shall soon lie “in the tomb, disfigured, dishonored, bereft of form. . . . Why have we been given over unto corruption, and why have we been wedded unto death? Truly as it is written, by the command of God.”

In Holy Scripture, God tells the children of Adam that, having chosen to transgress the commandments, we shall surely die. “For which cause, O Lord, Thou didst condemn [us] to return again unto the earth whence [we were] taken.” However, in that same funeral service, the Church also reminds us that “the saints have found the fountain of life.”

Saint Paul reminds us, in the opening quote, that “we have a building from God . . . eternal in the heavens.” We who call ourselves Christians walk “by faith, not by sight” (vs. 7). We know that our present “house” will be destroyed, and yet we remain confident of a better “building” from God (vs. 1).

What gives the apostle such a great confidence? First, we understand that the earthly *house* (vs. 1) to which the Apostle refers is our physical body, drawn from the elements of this earth. Saint Paul likens the body to the tent or tabernacle that God commanded Moses and the people of Israel to use during their nomadic years: a sanctuary for worship, where He “will appear among you” (Ex 25:8). Saint Paul deliberately chooses this image to remind us of two things. Our mortal bodies are temporary and easily destroyed (vs. 1), and yet even in this life our bodies may become dwellings for the Holy Spirit, who is eternal (vs. 5). The apostle further contrasts his first image – a mere “tent” – with a building that is “eternal in the heavens” (vs. 1).

The body “in the heavens” is a work of God, as is our earthly body. The earthly body, in which death already is at work, causes us to *groan* (vs. 2). With our present aches and pains, we experience in advance the disfigurement, dishonoring, and dissolution to come, for even now death causes us to groan in this earthly house.

Saint Paul also employs the imagery of clothing. Just as this body will be put off like old, soiled clothes, even so God provides us with an eternal body, which we are to put on. We know something of this heavenly body from the accounts of Christ’s Resurrection appearances. These cause us to desire “to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven” (vs. 2).

Note the apostle’s next remark: “If indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked” (vs. 3). God intends that we, who have united ourselves to Christ Jesus in the mystery of baptism, should have our mortality “swallowed up by life” (vs. 4). Of course, all of us shall then “appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body” (vs. 10). Thus, the possibility of being clothed with a heavenly body remains subject to Christ’s judgment. And yet we are encouraged, for we know God’s compassionate intentions and His mercy. Earlier, Saint Paul spoke of our earthly form as a tent (vs. 1) to remind us that our physical bodies are meant to be dwelling places for God. Now he mentions the Spirit of God, the intended divine occupant. “Therefore we make it our aim . . . to be well pleasing to Him” (vs. 9). The Spirit is God’s gift, so that after the judgment we may not fail to be clothed in our heavenly body. Trust the Spirit, and walk with Him now in faith!

Grant us, O Lord, a good defense before Thy fearful Judgment Seat. – Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom

November 24 – Twenty-second Sunday after Pentecost
Galatians 6:11-18

Looking Good: Galatians 6:11-18, especially vs. 18: *“Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.”* In this passage we are given two alternatives: “looking good” (see vs. 12) or truly “embracing the Lord’s grace in your spirit” (vs. 18). To the latter, the apostle says “amen” (vs. 18): so be it.

In this present existence we call life, we continually face these two choices. It is possible for us to appear to have the grace of Christ in our spirit (vs. 18) while only making “a good showing” (vs. 12). God, however, instantly discerns what is behind our appearances.

As Christ our God says, “No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon” (Lk 16:13). It all comes down to where we invest our hearts. What do we make our top priority, day in and day out? What really counts for us, in our heart of hearts?

In the early days of Christianity, the faith seemed like nothing but another sect within Judaism. Some Jews believed in Jesus as the Messiah, while others did not. This remained the case until the apostles shared the faith with other nationalities.

Saint Peter was called to the home of the Roman centurion Cornelius, a man in Joppa of Palestine who was surely a pagan by birth and culture (Acts 10:1-8, 21-23). After he shared the faith with Cornelius’ household, it was clear that “God gave them the same gift as . . . when [Peter and the others] believed on the Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 11:17). So the apostle had them baptized.

Perhaps Cornelius kept the kosher food laws. Maybe he was circumcised, which was the typical expression for a non-Jewish man of his conversion to Judaism. However, when Saint Paul went into Gentile areas like Galatia (Acts 14), he formed congregations but did not require circumcision. Why? Because he knew that God “had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles” (Acts 14:27). What does “opening the door of faith” mean, if not staking one’s life on the Lord Jesus (Acts 11:17) and embracing “the grace of . . . Christ . . . with your spirit” (Gal 6:18)?

God, after all, discerns what is in our hearts, even if we fool some people with our outward behavior (Heb 4:12). Genuine Christianity is a matter of the heart – having a heartfelt desire to please God – even if we do not always do a great job of walking “according to the new creation” (Gal 6:15) so that “peace and mercy [is] upon [us]” (vs. 16).

God be merciful to us! We all fall short, as did the apostles and the saints. They, however, persisted until the end. They stayed with the struggle. Maybe they had moments when they worried about appearances and looking good – as Saint Peter did (Gal 2:11-13). Yet we see that their lives were anchored in Christ, for they had the ability to weep and to correct their behavior when they were wrong (Lk 22:60-62). And the Lord Jesus forgave them (Jn 21:15-17).

So, we come back to where we started, considering our alternatives: to look good outwardly or to embrace Christ in our hearts for correction, cleansing, forgiveness, and the strength to live the “new creation.” May we “walk according to this rule” (Gal 6:16)!

In this reading, Saint Paul offers not a comfortable word but a strong message for us to hear and embrace: “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” (vs. 14).

Let us be honest: a cross is not pretty. This painful mode of execution meant agonizing suffering and death. When we choose to stop “looking good” and seek “the grace of Christ in our spirits,” it means taking up a cross. May the Lord Jesus grant us the grace to do just that!

We all have sinned against Thy compassion; yet do not overlook us, O merciful Christ.
– Feast of the Elevation of the Holy Cross

November 25 – Monday of the Twenty-third Week after Pentecost
1 Thessalonians 1:1-5

Three Principle Virtues: 1 Thessalonians 1:1-5, especially vss. 2-3: “We give thanks to God always for you all . . . remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father.” “Suppose there is someone who does not doubt in his heart (Mk 11:23),” writes Saint Maximos the Confessor, “that is to say, who does not dispute in his intellect [*nous*] and through such doubt sever that immediate union with God which has been brought about by faith, but who is dispassionate or, rather, has already become god through union with God by faith; then it is quite natural that if such a person says to a mountain, Go to another place, it will go (Mt 17:20).

“The mountain here indicates the will and the law of the flesh, which is ponderous and hard to shift, and in fact, so far as our natural powers are concerned, is totally immovable and unshakable” (*Philokalia* vol. 2, pp. 189-190).

Here, Saint Maximos explains why Saint Paul couples the need for faith with work, love with labor, and hope with patience. Perhaps we have studied the mountain on a map, looking for ways over glacier and crevasse. We may even have hiked on steep trails and narrow ledges. So far, however, we have gained only a hint of what is required to reach the summit.

But to *move* the mountain? Lord, have mercy! Our struggles to date reveal our complete dependence on God, for even our faith is a gift from Him. Yet we also acknowledge that God does not bestow faith capriciously or randomly. He constantly stirs our hearts, calling us to work with Him by means of our fragile and halting faith.

“You should understand that God stimulates and allures in order . . . that He may be desired and loved by His creatures,” declares Saint Maximos. “God stimulates in that He impels each being, in accordance with its own principle, to return to Him” (p. 282).

Indeed, we need to respond to God’s stimulus, for our faith is measured by the zeal with which we grasp the encouragement that God extends. If we take risks based on our small belief, the tiny mustard seed of faith will grow (Mt 17:20).

Saint Paul gives thanks when he sees the Thessalonians acting in faith, taking “toddler steps.” By such tentative steps we, too, may gain a strong, abiding faith and lay the foundation for the other principle virtues: love and hope.

“The struggle is great,” according to Metropolitan Hierotheos Vlachos. “It is not an easy thing to transform oneself, to cleanse oneself from passions and fill oneself with virtues. For the purification of man is negative and positive. According to the Fathers, spiritual warfare is carried on by keeping the commandments of Christ, and we know that when a person struggles to subject his body to his soul and his soul to God, the virtues of body and soul are produced” (*Orthodox Psychotherapy*, p. 285).

Let us enlarge the hope within us by our feeble efforts to keep the commandment to love. Like infants, we mimic our loving Father and seek to love as He has loved us (Jn 13:34). To love others is an act of faith, especially if we are to love them as God loves – sacrificially.

“Strive to love every man equally, and you will simultaneously expel all the passions” (*Philokalia* vol. 2, p. 315). If we begin to love sacrificially, in the Lord’s way, then we may see genuine growth in faith. Such comes only by God’s grace; it gives us hope of attaining union with God and the possibility of moving “the mountain of our will and flesh,” to return to Saint Maximos’ initial point.

O Lord, remember the infirmity of our flesh, and for Thy goodness’ sake come and dwell in us, working in us that which is well-pleasing in Thy sight, that we may hymn Thy glory.

– Archimandrite Sophrony Sakharov

November 26 – Tuesday of the Twenty-third Week after Pentecost
1 Thessalonians 1:6-10

Following Christ: 1 Thessalonians 1:6-10, especially vss. 6-7: “*And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became examples to all. . . .*” The lives of the Apostle Paul and of Saint Maximos the Confessor were marked by struggle and pain. Their example challenges us to follow our Lord as they did. “He who loves Christ is bound to imitate Him to the best of his ability,” insists Saint Maximos. “Christ, for example, was always conferring blessings on people; He was longsuffering when they were ungrateful and blasphemed Him; and when they beat Him and put Him to death, He endured it, imputing no evil at all to anyone. These are the three acts which manifest love for one’s neighbor. If he is incapable of them, the person who says that he loves Christ or has attained the kingdom deceives himself” (*Philokalia* vol. 2, p. 107).

Here is what happens to us when we follow Christ. As the saint declares, our afflictions are coupled with joy and a saving influence on the lives of others.

We should not be surprised that affliction should come when we follow the Lord Jesus. This world is in a state of darkness and blight. According to Saint John of Kronstadt, “The world is in a state of slumber, or sinful sleep. It sleeps [because] . . . we sinful men . . . love space, freedom, vain carnal freshness [and] are slothful, negligent, and evil” (*My Life In Christ*, p. 152).

We should expect the world to lash out at us if we dare to awaken it from sinful sleep, if we exemplify Christ in truth. The Lord warns us: “If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you” (Jn 15:18-19).

This is the spiritual logic: affliction comes to those who follow Christ because He is the source of all goodness, love, and truth. Invariably, the world will seek to evade or silence any intrusions on its territory, for the ruler of the present darkness strikes out against the Light.

If we receive hatred when we wake the world from its “sinful sleep,” then why do we experience joy when this backlash comes? Joy in Christ is not a kind of mundane happiness or delight. As the Apostle Paul says of the Thessalonians who endured affliction, it is “with joy of the Holy Spirit” (1 Thes 1:6). Joy comes into our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

What kind of joy does the Spirit bring, if not spiritual reassurance? As followers of Christ, “when [men] revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake,” we may choose to “rejoice and be exceedingly glad” (Mt 5:11-12). We understand that in such circumstances we are “blessed . . . for great is your reward in heaven.”

The Martyr Orestes endured unspeakable tortures, and yet he prayed, “O Lord Jesus Christ . . . vouchsafe me to become a member of the choir of those who have suffered for Thee and who have inherited Thy kingdom.” The afflicted in Christ have before them the “author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame” (Heb 12:2). They know that He will receive His true followers into the Kingdom.

Our influence on the hearts and lives of non-believers – if we walk faithfully and joyfully in Christ, enduring afflictions – is unpredictable. They may join the persecutors out of fear, or be moved by the witness of love to turn away “from idols to serve the living and true God” (1 Thes 1:9). What we do know is that when we follow Christ in a pure and Spirit-inspired manner, no one around us remains in a state of indifference.

O Lord, by the sufferings Thy saints endured for Thy sake, have compassion and heal the sufferings of those who cry out unto Thee, O Thou only Lover of mankind. – Hymn for a martyr

November 27 - Wednesday of the Twenty-third Week after Pentecost
1 Thessalonians 2:1-8

Apostolic Standards: 1 Thessalonians 2:1-8, especially vs. 8: “So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us.” The apostles of the Lord freely imparted their firsthand knowledge of the Messiah, offering themselves to others for the sake of truth even to the point of death and imprisonment. Now, in First Thessalonians, Saint Paul reminds his followers that he came to them “as . . . approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel . . . not as pleasing men” (vs. 4), and as “gentle . . . as a nursing mother” (vs. 7).

In today’s passage, Saint Paul lists ten standards he follows in sharing the gospel. Let us examine these standards and apply them to ourselves, to our relationships with the unchurched and the uncertain, and even to those who are opposed to Christ.

First, we speak honestly of God even in the midst of conflict (vs. 2). We are wholly united to God in Christ Jesus so long as we honor Him in everything we say and do. Let no one intimidate us, while at the same time we maintain love and compassion.

Second, we know and speak only the truth (vs. 3). We impart “the message of the cross, foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Cor 1:18). Our firm foundation can never be shaken by the world’s “facts.”

Third, we avoid *uncleanness*, speaking only in purity (1 Thes 2:3). We share the gospel in a personal manner, communicating the truth of God by the way we live. We avoid being disqualified as a witness by personal sin or moral laxity, striving to purify heart and soul.

Fourth, let us be open (vs. 4). When a telemarketer asks, “How are you today?” we know a sales pitch is coming. May this never be so with us! If we are committed to Christ, we let the truth of the faith be open and obvious – because it is *in us*, undisguised by words or gimmicks.

Fifth, we speak to others in a manner *pleasing* to God (vs. 4). What we say must be measured against God’s standards, rather than the tastes or convictions of others. We ask ourselves, “Are my words, actions, thoughts, and manner pleasing to the Lord?”

Sixth, we never use *flattering words* (vs. 5), for flattery is inflated praise based on self-interest. When Lord praises Saint Peter for confessing Him as the Christ, He praises the evidence of God’s grace in the apostle, not the merits of Saint Peter himself (Mt 16:17, 23).

Seventh, we do not let *covetousness* cloud our relationships (vs. 5). The world encourages us to use others for our convenience, but the Lord sees the heart: “God is witness” (vs. 5). He commands us not to covet (Dt 5:21), for greed destroys.

Eighth, we flee *glory from men* (vs. 6). The love of praise banishes “remembrance of God from the soul . . . [leaving] a tumult of the passions within us” (*Philokalia* vol. 2, p. 14). The monastic saints often fled their communities to avoid praise of their holiness.

Ninth, we ought to forgo our *demands* on others (vs. 6). When we demand, we ask from others as if we had authority over them. The Apostle Paul was appointed by Christ our God and had no higher authority than Him. We are to offer the gospel freely, as he did, for not even God demands that we love the truth.

Finally, let us be *gentle* in nurturing others (vs. 7). “Will a woman forget her child?” (Is 49:15). God answers: “Even if a woman should forget . . . I shall not forget you. . . . You are continually before Me” (vss. 15-16). Let us truly care for those whom God brings to us.

O holy apostles, ye didst sincerely prefer to all things the greatly desired divine love which linketh its lovers to the Beloved. Plead with Him to lighten and save our souls.

– Based on a hymn for Saints Peter and Paul

November 28 – Thursday of the Twenty-third Week after Pentecost
1 Thessalonians 2:9-14

Inner Work: 1 Thessalonians 2:9-14, especially vs. 13: *“For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.”* This verse tells us that even as we hear “the word of God,” it is at the same time at work *within* us. While Saint Paul lived with the Thessalonians, he disciplined them in the faith and formed them for the life in Christ (vss. 11-12). He notes two results from his labors: first, the Thessalonian Christians have received the word of God; secondly, that same word continues to work effectively within them.

God first accomplishes a change in the hearts and souls of the Thessalonian converts. Yet tangible, physical suffering follows (vs. 14). Saint Paul explains that apostolic work, being inwardly effective, invariably changes our outward behavior. Unbelievers may well object to these changes and even resist the faith with force.

Saint Paul preaches “the gospel of God” to the faithful in Thessalonica (vs. 9). To reach our hearts, God’s word must first enter through our physical senses. For this reason the Apostle Paul stresses the necessity of preaching: “How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?” (Rom 10:14). He further notes that God provides the preachers: “And how shall they preach unless they are sent?” (vs. 15).

God commands those who preach the good news not to advance their own thoughts and interests, only the word of God. The apostles’ purpose in writing Holy Scripture is to obey this same command, so that they may be “approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim 2:15).

The Holy Spirit anoints both the preacher and the hearers who open their hearts. The Spirit enters where there is faith and the conviction to live for Christ. All this happens within the hearts of the hearers, who thus become believers and doers of the word.

Preaching is of course necessary, but it gains authority only when it is lived in a godly manner. Outsiders and potential converts – as well as the faithful – must see tangible evidence of the inward work of God.

Hence, the Apostle Paul declares that the character of his “labor and toil . . . night and day” caused no “burden to any” (1 Thes 2:9). He thus reminds the Thessalonians that they have seen “how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe” (vs. 10).

If we are to risk taking on the inner and outer work of the gospel, we need to see Christ-like honesty and godly action. Then we are led to embrace the God’s truth in our own hearts, and live this truth through actions and words.

While preaching and exemplary living encourage the faithful to cooperate in the work of the Holy Spirit, the same must occur as inquirers are disciplined. Saint Paul specifies what is required: exhortation, encouragement, and charging (vs. 11). These activities nurture God’s people and aid them in walking “worthy of God” (vs. 12). When such efforts are met with open hearts, the faithful become “imitators of the churches of God” (vs. 14).

Finally, Saint Paul offers us a warning. Given the fallen condition of this world, the hardness of heart among non-believers will certainly bring suffering upon us if we imitate Christ and His apostles (see vss. 14-16).

O Lord, fill us with Thy Spirit, encourage our faint hearts, and turn us from wandering. – Divine Liturgy of Saint Basil the Great

November 29 - Friday of the Twenty-third Week after Pentecost
1 Thessalonians 2:14-19

Between Now and Then: 1 Thessalonians 2:14-19, especially vs. 19: “For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?” In the Nicene Creed we say, “I look for the Resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.” As we speak those words, we are confessing *now*, in the present moment. When the Lord returns, that will be *then*: “Then many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to disgrace and everlasting shame” (Dan 12:2).

Now, there is suffering (1 Thes 2:14). Now, hostility rages in the world, for there are men who “do not please God and are contrary to all men” (vs. 15). Then, “in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, [He] ‘will render to each one according to his deeds’” (Rom 2:5). Now, Satan hinders us (1 Thes 2:18). Then, according to the Lord’s true promise, we shall see “Satan fall like lightning from heaven” (Lk 10:18).

Between now and then, Christ calls us to embrace suffering and hostility from the world, and hindrances from Satan. And yet we never lose hope of being “in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ” at His coming (1 Thes 2:19). Now, while there is time, we learn to attain this hope.

Note how Saint Paul commends the Thessalonians for imitating the “churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus” (vs. 14). He offers a pattern for us to follow in the time between now and the coming of the kingdom of God – a model for our lives, thoughts, and actions based on the glorious example of the saints who came before us.

Those hostile to Orthodox Christianity abound. We seldom lack opportunities to strive alongside our fathers and mothers in the faith. For example, we are told how the Sanhedrin threatened the Apostles Peter and John for preaching in the Temple after healing a lame man (Acts 3:1-4:22). What do these saints do?

With their fellow Christians, they consider the Prophet David’s question, “Why have the heathen raged, and the peoples meditated empty things . . . against the Lord and against His Christ?” (Ps 2:1-2).

Then they pray: “Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word” (Acts 4: 29). The world remains hostile to the faith, and would happily drown us in its smug wisdom. Yet we follow the apostles and pray that God would “preserve . . . the Holy Orthodox faith, and all Orthodox Christians, unto ages of ages.” We continue to “speak . . . that [all] may be saved” (1 Thes 2:16).

In the face of resistance to the truth, we continue like the saints of old to wait upon God to deliver us from the hand of the wicked, even while the Lord delays His wrath and while men “fill up the measure of their sins” (vs. 16). We remember what Saint Makarios of Egypt said: “Being bountiful and full of love, God awaits with great patience the repentance of every sinner, and He celebrates the return of the sinner with celestial rejoicing” (*Philokalia* vol. 3, p. 315).

God’s reason for delaying His wrath is to allow every person time for repentance. Meanwhile we, as faithful witnesses to the true Life, continue to love those who are resisting God. May God use us fruitfully to turn the hearts of others and save them from destruction.

Finally, we remember that we are not alone in this struggle. Even when Saint Paul is absent from Thessalonica, he is present in heart and soul (vs. 17). Let nothing separate us “from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:39), nor cut us off from our brethren around the world in the Body of Christ. We suffer together. They stand closer to us, despite the physical distance between us, than do all those who oppose the faith.

Help us; save us; have mercy on us; and keep us, O God, by Thy grace.

– Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom

November 30 - November 30 – Saint Andrew the First-Called
1 Corinthians 4:9-16

Apostolic Imitation: 1 Corinthians 4:9-16, especially vs 15, 16: “For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the Gospel. Therefore I urge you, imitate me.” The long-standing practice of Orthodox Christianity is to pass on the Faith foremost through spiritual elders. Transmitting the Gospel happens far less through mere ideas, and far more through what Father Alexander Schmemmann calls “supra-individual, precisely cosmic, ecclesial and eschatological” experience.

Note this counsel from Kiev, of a father to a son: “In the city where you are living...seek a God-fearing man - and serve him with all your strength. Having found such a man you need grieve no more; you have found the key to the Kingdom of Heaven; adhere to him with soul and body; observe his life, his walking, sitting, looking, eating....first of all....keep his words.”

The present reading reveals the Apostolic beginnings of this Orthodox practice. Saint Paul calls on his disciples at Corinth to follow the “spectacle” of his living (vs 9-13). Note that he points to his special relationship with them as a *father* rather than as an *instructor* (vs 15). It is from this personal, discipling relationship that he bids them, “imitate me” (vs 16).

Rather than examine the dramatic details of the Apostle Paul’s life, turn attention to Saint Paul’s fatherly relationship to the fledgling disciples at Corinth. In the Church there may be tens of thousands of instructors in Christ, but Saint Paul points to his unique relationship with them as a *father* (vs 15). In chapter eighteen of Acts, there is a brief account of his founding work with the Corinthians (Acts 18:1-18) that illumines the distinction between teachers and spiritual elders.

When the Apostle Paul first arrived in Corinth, he became acquainted with a couple, Aquila and Priscilla, fellow Jews and recent deportees from the city of Rome (Acts 18:2). The three discovered that they shared a common trade, and soon established themselves as tent-makers (Acts 18:3). At that time Saint Paul made himself known at the local Synagogue as an expositor of the Scriptures, both with Jews and with interested Greeks. Significantly, at first, he did not directly testify “that Jesus is the Christ,” the Messiah (Acts 18:4,5). But by the time his Apostolic companions arrived, he was beginning to feel constrained to do so (Acts 18:5).

When he did witness to Jesus, opposition swiftly developed, and he withdrew from the Synagogue to devote himself to the Gentiles (Acts 18:6). Saint Paul then worked with a group who “believed on the Lord” and many were baptized (Acts 18:7-8). In a vision, the Lord Jesus also encouraged Paul to continue his witnessing (Acts 18:9-10). Do you see that at first he began by teaching and that only later he began witnessing to the living Lord Whom he knew?

In the Holy Tradition, we have seen the requirement that one must “join a God-fearing man” to receive consolation from the Lord. Teaching “about” the Faith is not the same as “discipling,” a distinction the Lord Himself makes in His Great Commission: “Going, therefore, disciple all the nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [then] teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you” (Mt 28:19,20).

Teaching has a place, but discipling is essential. One is “begotten...through the Gospel” (1 Cor 4:15). Teaching must occur, followed by discipling. “Fathering,” which begets, must have the greatest weight within each disciple so that any rational learning about the Faith is formed in the heart. Orthodox disciples mature as they imitate the living substance in their fathers-in-God - rather than as they accumulate mere facts from teachers.

O Lord, help me to imitate those who know Thee, that I may be made worthy of Thee.