

November 1 – Saturday of the Twenty-third Week after Pentecost
Luke 8:16-21

Full Disclosure: Luke 8:16-21, especially vs. 18: *“Therefore take heed how you hear. For whoever has, to him more will be given; and whoever does not have, even what he seems to have will be taken from him.”* Following his tragic moral failure, the penitent King David confesses to God: “Against Thee only have I sinned and done this evil before Thee” (Ps 50:4). In his full disclosure of his sin, David neither sidesteps nor glosses over his misdeeds. He does not explain his sin nor qualify his guilt. He fully exposes his soul before God, saying, “I have sinned. I have done evil,” adding, “that Thou mightest be justified in Thy words, and prevail when Thou art judged” (Ps 50:4).

As part of being completely forthright, King David exonerates God. The fault is entirely his. If anyone questions whether God might have prevented David’s sin, or intervened so that he would not have been tempted, the king would quickly respond, “The blame is mine entirely. God has no culpability or fault in this matter.”

When we hear David’s admission, should we not immediately adopt his stance ourselves? Let us avoid compounding our sins by faulting or implicating God for our iniquity. Before the objective bar of judgment, which is God’s great judgment seat, stands our Savior, who is pure, holy, and without sin, far above our fallen state.

At the dawn of time God told Adam, “You may eat food from every tree in the garden; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you may not eat; for in whatever day you eat from it, you shall die by death” (Gn 2:16-17). The moment we sin, the Lord’s words of full disclosure loom before us. The words King David speaks in the Psalm 50 could just as well have been spoken by Adam, or by us as sons and daughters of Adam. From the dawn of the bad news of sin and death to this very moment, “death prevailed and swallowed them” (Is 25:8).

We sin strictly as a matter of our own fault. Still, let us not despair! The same rule of full disclosure is at work in the Gospel. God has taken on our nature, except for sin, so that He might overcome the death that comes as a consequence of our sins. He gives life exactly as the Prophet Isaiah foretold: “This is our God, in whom we hoped and rejoiced exceedingly; and we shall be glad in His salvation” (Is 25:9).

Christ is God’s full disclosure, God’s forthright revelation. He is God’s ultimate exposition of the wondrous new possibility of repentance, forgiveness, and eternal life.

Yes, there are those who have never heard the Gospel, but our compassionate God deals fairly with all. Such is His gracious nature and lovingkindness. The lamp of the Gospel is on the lampstand of history. Everyone who comes into the room of the Church can hear, see, and “take light from the Light that is never overtaken by night” (Resurrection Service of Pascha). Those who unite themselves to the Body of Christ through baptism and chrismation also receive holy illumination.

The Lord’s final point is that each of us is accountable only for the light he has received (Lk 8:16-17). Yes, we can lose the blessing that the Lord has bestowed upon us; we must never forget that “even what he seems to have will be taken from him” (vs. 18). There is another side – if we follow what we understand with all our heart, we shall receive more of God’s uncreated light.

God help us, every one, never to fall into the temptation or cover over our sins thereafter, or to hide God’s full disclosure to others around us. We are to walk in the light and receive more light. Members of Christ, let us attend! (vs. 21).

Illumine our hearts, O Lord, that we may bring forth plenteously the fruit of Thy pure light that Thou has shed into our hearts, and so be filled with Thine undying Light.

November 2 - Twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost
Saint Luke 8:26-39

To Meet God: Luke 8:26-39, especially vs. 28: *“When he saw Jesus, he cried out, fell down before Him, and with a loud voice said, ‘What have I to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg You, do not torment me!’”* Many attempts had been made to control this possessed man-turned-beast, but “no one could bind him, not even with chains” (see also Mk 5:3; Mt 8:29). When the Lord Jesus came before him (Lk 8:27), the demoniac, out of agony, actually spoke with Jesus.

To meet God is both arresting and healing. Why is this so? Because when we meet the One who is everything we are not, He draws us to become what we were created to be. Naked flesh becomes clothed in the Spirit, impurity is cleansed, death is restored to life, violence and wrath become gentle love, torment becomes passionlessness, fear becomes peace, and the self in bondage becomes self-controlled.

The demon-possessed man “wore no clothes” (vs. 27) – not in order to protect the frenzied man from himself, but because his soul is drowning in the “filthiness of the flesh and spirit” (2 Cor 7:1). Then Christ comes and he is found “clothed and in his right mind” (Lk 8:35). When we bring catechumens to Christ, we beg God to clothe each one in “a robe of light,” since each of us is meant to grow in the glory of the Holy Trinity.

Saint Luke describes the wild man as one inhabited by a legion, for “many demons had entered him” (vs. 30). These evil beings enabled him to break all the “chains and shackles” used in efforts to restrain him (vs. 29). He bursts out violently until he meets the Lord Jesus. Note that Christ comes as calming love, enabling those who know Him to “continue . . . in [His] love,” “keep [His] commandments,” and “abide in [His] love” (Jn 15:9-10).

Death hovers nearby throughout the account of this meeting. We cannot accurately say that the man lived in the tombs as one would in a home; he only existed there (Lk 8:27). When the exorcised legion of demons “entered the swine, the herd ran violently down the steep place into the lake and drowned” (vs. 33).

The Giver of Life meets us while we are trapped in death. He tramples mortality under foot and bestows life on all the “tombs” in which we eke out existence. We are buried with Christ through baptism into death to “walk in newness of life” (Rom 6:4).

Fear ruled “the country of the Gadarenes” (Lk 8:26). Then the Lord Jesus comes. The demoniac dreads torment from Him (vs. 28). The demons beg Christ that “He would not command them to go out into the abyss” (vs. 31). The swine-keepers flee when they “saw what had happened” to the pigs (vs. 34), and “the whole multitude of the surrounding region of the Gadarenes asked the Lord to depart from them, for they were seized with great fear” (vs. 37).

However, peace calmed “the man from whom the demons had departed,” so that he begged Jesus “that he might be with Him” (vs. 38). Indeed, “perfect love casts out fear” (1 Jn 4:18). Saint Luke makes it abundantly clear that the possessed man was out of control within himself, and uncontrollable by others. He was a man in agony, torment, and slavery, but the Lord Jesus Christ is Savior and Lord. He heals.

The man not only became “clothed and in his right mind” (Lk 8:35), but he also knew from the direct experience “what great things Jesus had done for him” (vs. 39). Christ heals if we will run and meet Him, for He is the gracious Lord even over torment and death.

Thou art the Hope of the hopeless, and the Repose of those who labor and are heavy-laden in iniquity, and unto Thee we ascribe glory together with Thy Father and the Holy Spirit.

November 3 – Monday of the Twenty-fourth Week after Pentecost
Luke 11:29-33

Behold the Light: Luke 11:29-33, especially vs. 33: *“No one, when he has lit a lamp, puts it in a secret place or under a basket, but on a lampstand, that those who come in may see the light.”* God placed His light in a prominent land, so that today it shines on every nation on earth. Yes, Palestine, located in the crescent where civilization emerged, continues to dominate the news. The entire Middle East holds the attention of the world, century after century.

Imperial Rome came to the Levant and, during the reign of Caesar Augustus, the light was born in Bethlehem of Judea (Lk 2:1-7). Byzantine civilization later honored the Holy Land where this light shone, and its emperors and citizens knew the light as Holy Wisdom (vs. 11:31). Later, Islam overran the Middle East and the Crusaders fought to win it back. During two modern world wars, the Holy Land was thought to be a major prize. Current events still revolve around this poor lampstand as a center of attention.

Christ the Light spoke in the tradition of the Prophet Jonah (vss. 29-30). He revealed divine wisdom, being Himself true Wisdom (vs. 31). Christ the Light, whom God placed on the world's prominent lampstand, neither hid among the elect few nor secreted Himself with dark, esoteric knowledge. Rather, He displayed Himself so that all peoples of the world “may see the Light” and be saved (vs. 33).

Jesus of Nazareth was the ultimate Prophet. He spoke in the tradition of the prophets of God who foretold His coming. Like the prophets of Israel before Him, He declared the truth about His generation: like their forefathers, they were “an evil generation” (vs. 29). From the start of His ministry, He called His people to repent, begging them to believe the Gospel that He proclaimed (Mk 1:15). Some perceived the light, changed their hearts and minds, and followed Him.

However, as would become the pattern down the generations, the majority of people in the first century did not repent at the Lord's preaching (Lk 11:32). Rather, they arrogantly demanded signs and wonders from Him (vs. 11:16). Christ graciously promised them “the sign of Jonah” (vs. 29). As Saint John Chrysostom put it, He declared “both that He would die for them, and that they would profit nothing,” like Jonah in the whale.

And yet He struck “the first note of the doctrine of His resurrection, and confirming it by the type.” He warned the people of the first century that “the men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed one greater than Jonah is here” (vs. 32).

May we perceive the Light and not be condemned! Let us behold the Light who gives wisdom. He answered King Solomon's prayer: “Give Your servant a heart to hear and to judge Your people in righteousness, and to discern between good and evil. For who can judge this great people of Yours?” (3 Kgs 3:8).

During Solomon's reign, all Israel “saw that the wisdom of God was in him” (3 Kgs 3:27). However, when the true Light “came to His own . . . His own did not receive Him” (Jn 1:11). They failed to perceive Divine Wisdom. May God grant that we, like the Queen of Sheba, are able see and hear true Wisdom, who indeed is “greater than Solomon” (Lk 11:31).

O Lord, our true Light who givest “light to every man coming into the world” (Jn. 1:9), help us repent and not be condemned with those who fail to see Thee gleaming radiantly over all the earth, but grant that we may shine with virtues as we behold Thee, O Life of all.

November 4 – Tuesday of the Twenty-fourth Week after Pentecost
Luke 11:34-41

Full of Light: Luke 11:34-41, especially vs. 34: *“The lamp of the body is the eye. Therefore when your eye is good, your whole body also is full of light. But when your eye is bad, your body also is full of darkness.”* In this reading, the Lord Jesus cautions us to pay attention to the innermost state of our hearts and souls. He uses tangible images to contrast integrity and hypocrisy. Ironically, the Pharisee who “asked Him to dine with him” (vs. 37) proceeds to illustrate the choice that haunts every one of us. Will our hearts be ruled by darkness (vs. 35) or a “bright shining” light to aid us in overcoming this fallen world (vs. 36)?

Saint Symeon the New Theologian clarifies the Lord’s words by commenting on the importance of the *nous*, or eye of the heart, which is at the center of our inner life. “What else does He mean by ‘the eye’ than simply the mind [*nous*] which will never become simple unless it contemplates the simple light? The simple light is Christ. He who has His light shining in his mind is said to have the mind of Christ” (cf 1 Cor 2:16) (“Discourses,” ACCS New Testament, vol. 3, pp. 196-7).

What kind of light shines deep in the center of our heart, in our *nous*, and dominates our thoughts? Christ is plainly giving us a noetic warning. Deep within, we are either sound or corrupt, healthy or sick. “Therefore,” He says, “take heed that the light which is in you is not darkness” (vs. 35).

We find it easy to become diverted and caught up in futile struggles against distractions, soothing images, or alluring enticements of all sorts. But take heart! In another place, Saint Symeon says, “As soon as the intellect [*nous*] attains the place of the heart, at once it sees things of which it previously knew nothing. It sees the open space within the heart and it beholds itself entirely luminous and full of discrimination” (p. 197).

What is the source or identity of this “simple light” that shines noetically within us? According to Saint Symeon, “The simple light is Christ.” The Apostle Paul says, “Awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light” (Eph 5:14). Christ is the light, as we sing during the Resurrection service of Pascha: “Come ye take light from the Light, that is never overtaken by night.”

What makes it so difficult for our “whole body [to be] . . . full of light, having no dark part, [so that] the whole body will be full of light, as when the bright shining of a lamp gives [us] light” (vs. 36)? We turn away from Christ, of course, but that answer is overly simplified.

Our Lord reproaches a certain Pharisee who “asked Him to dine with him” (vs. 37). By all appearances, the man does not turn away from Christ. He even offers Jesus the hospitality of his home and table. But our Savior focuses on his noetic state, on the innermost life: does he, and do we, strive for light from Him who is Light?

Note that no word is spoken by the Pharisee. Yet Christ, who already knows what is “in man” (Jn 2:25), hears his thoughts as clearly as if they are spoken out loud when the Pharisee “marveled that He had not first washed before dinner” (vs. 38).

We turn away inwardly because we are of the flesh, so that “the sinful passions which were aroused by the law [are] at work in our members to bear fruit to death. But now we have been delivered from the law . . . so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter” (Rom 7:5-6).

We have the freedom to heed the Master when He warns us about the dangers lurking within our heart. This is the place where our salvation is being fought out! If we attend to the *nous* and never allow it to be filled with greed and wickedness, we can make sure “that the light which is in [us] is not darkness” (Lk 11:35). May we ever embrace Christ, the true Light.

Dispel all darkness from our heart, O Light of all, lest we sleep unto death in sins. – Orthros Prayer

November 5 - Wednesday of the Twenty-fourth Week after Pentecost
Luke 11:42-46

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

November 6 – Thursday of the Twenty-fourth Week after Pentecost
Luke 11:47-12:1

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

November 7 - Friday of the Twenty-fourth Week after Pentecost
Luke 12:2-12

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

November 8 - Saturday of the Twenty-fourth Week after Pentecost
Luke 9:1-6

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

November 9 - Twenty-fourth Sunday after Pentecost
Luke 8:41-56

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

November 10 - Monday of the Twenty-fifth Week after Pentecost
Luke 12:13-15, 22-31

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

November 11 - Tuesday of the Twenty-fifth Week after Pentecost
Luke 12:42-48

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

November 13 - Saint John 10:9-16 Saint John Chrysostom: Archbishop of Constantinople

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

November 14 - Friday of the Twenty-fifth Week after Pentecost
Luke 13:31-35

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

November 15 - Saturday of the Twenty-fifth Week after Pentecost
Luke 9:37-43

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

November 16 - Twenty-fifth Sunday after Pentecost
Luke 10:25-37

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

November 17 - Monday of the Twenty-sixth Week after Pentecost
Luke 14:12-15

Caring for the Poor: Luke 14:12-15, especially vss. 13-14: *“But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just.”* The Lord Jesus proclaims we become worthy of “the resurrection of the just” (vs. 14) only by acting justly. He does not include the wicked (Mt 13:49), nor the unjust (Mt 5:45), nor those who claim they have no need to repent (Lk 15:7). Those few who are called *just* in the Gospels – Saint John the Baptist (Mk 6:20), Saint Joseph the Betrothed (Mt 1:19), Saint Joseph of Arimathea (Lk 23:50-53)—were “pure in heart” (Mt 5:8) and aided Christ.

We find evidence of purity of heart in the person who acts upon God’s will by sharing material wealth with the needy. If we, too, wish to be numbered among the just, we are to care for the poor. Repenting of our inordinate attachment to material goods, we apply our wealth to the acquisition of eternal riches.

In the Gospel reading for today, our Lord instructs us to care for the needy, for Christ Himself cares for the poor. He urges us to invite the weak and the despised to our feasts. “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich” (2 Cor 8:9).

Furthermore, as Holy Scripture teaches, “God is love” (1 Jn 4:16). Christ is the source of all love, and actively cares for those who suffer in situations of dire need. We find this abiding word in all of the prophets. When God reveals the future Incarnation of Christ to Isaiah, He asserts: “He shall not judge by reputation nor convict by common talk. But He will judge the cause of the humble” (Is 11:3-4).

As Christ’s disciples, we are not merely asked to provide material assistance to the needy, but also to care for the poor with pure hearts that keep God’s word. Saint Paul warns us that if we “bestow all [our] goods to feed the poor, and though [we] give [our] body to be burned, but have not love, it profits [us] nothing” (1 Cor 13:3).

Caring for the poor is not simply a kindness on our part; it is integral to our salvation. God declares, “Blessed is the man that hath understanding for the poor man and the pauper; in an evil day the Lord will deliver him” (Ps 40:1).

The Prophet Job describes his own attention to the poor: “For I saved the poor from the hand of the oppressor and helped the orphan who had no helper. The blessing of the perishing man came upon me, and the widow’s mouth blessed me. I put on righteousness and clothed myself with judgment like a robe. I was the eye of the blind and the foot of the lame. I was the father of the weak” (Job 29:12-16).

God’s blessing comes when we truly care for those who live in poverty. “Disperse [your wealth]. . . that thou mayest not lose,” advises Saint John Chrysostom, “[and] keep not, that thou mayest keep; lay out that thou mayest save; spend, that thou mayest gain” (*NPNF First Series*, vol. 10, p. 35).

According to Saint Arsenios of Paros, “If you want Christ to bless you and what you have, when you meet some poor individual who is hungry, and asks you for food, give him. Also, when you know that some poor man, or a widow, or an orphan are hungry, do not wait for them to ask you for food, but give them. Have faith that Christ invisibly blesses your few possessions” (Cavarnos, *Modern Orthodox Saints*, vol. 6, p. 103).

Grant us grace, O Lord, to open wide our hands and hearts to succor the poor and the destitute so that we may find the perfection of the Gospel in following Thee.

November 18 - Tuesday of the Twenty-sixth Week after Pentecost
Luke 14:25-35

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

November 19 - Wednesday of the Twenty-sixth Week after Pentecost
Luke 15:1-10

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

November 20 – Thursday of the Twenty-sixth Week after Pentecost
Luke 16:1-9

To Manage Well: Luke 16:1-9, especially vs. 2: “Give an account of your stewardship, for you can no longer be steward.” What does the Lord Jesus expect of us as we manage the material goods He puts into our hands? We are to be prudent with whatever He turns over to us. First, we are to acknowledge that everything belongs to God – we own nothing but are, in fact, only stewards (vs. 1). The Lord also sets standards for how we are to manage His world, and those who fail to keep His trust (vs. 2) are unworthy of the resurrection of the just.

The Lord Jesus naturally asserts His divine ownership of all things. According to Blessed Theophylact, “We are not masters of our own money, for we have nothing that is our own. We are merely stewards of things that belong to another, namely, our divine Master, who has entrusted those things into our hands so that we might use them well” (*Explanation of the Holy Gospel According to Saint Luke*, p. 206).

Embracing divine ownership places us in opposition to contemporary secular society, which operates on the basis of jealously-guarded ownership by human beings. Bank accounts may have taxpayer identification numbers, but God does not. Alas, even in our parishes where divine ownership tacitly is assumed, we are forced to establish “non-profit religious entities” as proof of human ownership.

This idea of tangible earthly ownership is a pervasive delusion running through the entire body politic. However, let us simply declare that we are stewards of God’s material world, no matter what the laws of society may say. Unless we are clear about our role as Christ’s disciples, we may easily be swept up into the many secular delusions generated by the fantasy that the world belongs to us, independent of God.

The parable of the wasteful steward teaches us to struggle within ourselves against this pervasive notion. It encourage us to acknowledge divine ownership within in the larger social order as best we can. At each juncture we must learn to ask, “How does my Master wish me to use these things?” We continue doing this until the habit becomes second nature.

The ownership question leads to the management standards set by the Lord Jesus for what He places in our hands. Most of us are prone to confusion in this area. If we look honestly at the way we approach things, we see that we fail to consult the Master about His wishes and often indulge ourselves with things solely for our pleasure. We avoid being accountable to Him. We abuse our freedom to use what we own however we desire.

The Lord uses a parable about a wasteful and wicked steward to awaken us to His real standards. Soon, Christ will ask us, “What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your stewardship” (vs. 2). But let us not despair as to whether we will make “a good defense before the dread Judgment Seat of Christ” (Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom). The parable shows us the means of salvation for all stewards.

First, we accept the truth that all worldly wealth, whether great or small, belongs to God. We then ask the Lord how we shall use it. When we listen to the Master, we open our hands to our debtors (vss. 6-7) and the poor (Dt 15:8).

We tithe ten percent of our income to the local church – the Body of Christ – where we worship. We live modestly, investing and spending as wise trustees of God, to whom we shall answer. We seek not to be self-serving stewards, but good managers of the riches of God.

O Master, make us ever mindful of our management of Thy great bounty as Thy stewards, and save us from the delusions of the enemy and our own cravings and passions.

November 21 - Saint Luke 10:38-42; 11:27-28 The Entrance of the Theotokos into Temple

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

November 22 – Saturday of the Twenty-sixth Week after Pentecost
Luke 9:57-62

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

November 23 – Twenty-sixth Sunday after Pentecost
Luke 12:16-21

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

November 24 – Monday of the Twenty-seventh Week after Pentecost
Luke 17:20-25

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

November 25 – Saint Luke 21:12-19 Great-Martyr Katherine the all-wise of Alexandria

Cultivating Patience: Saint Luke 21:12-19, especially vs.19: *“By your patience possess your souls.”* Our Lord and Master provides two directives for enduring persecution, trials, challenges, and temptations: 1) do “not...meditate beforehand on what you will answer” (vs. 14); and 2) “by your patience possess your souls” (vs. 19). Both admonitions concern necessary inner activity required for facing assaults, affronts and attacks. The first says, “Waste no time calculating your response;” and the other says, “Cultivate the virtue of patience within you.” These are not contradictory; our Lord is speaking of urgent, complementary, inner processes. Be attentive!

In effect, the Lord Jesus is saying that when challenged we should not allow our minds to flit around like butterflies, seeking how to answer, searching for just the right phrases, or thinking up the perfect retort. Do so and you will never attain “...a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries will not be able to contradict or resist.” (vs. 15). Christ may let us stumble. So, resist scrambling in your mind. Stop your thoughts and turn to the Lord. Say, “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner.” Learn from the Apostles Paul and Silas with their feet in the stocks in the dead of night. They “...were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them” (Acts 16:25) and a grand “...occasion for testimony” (Lk. 21:13) was given them to witness to the jailer and his whole family who were then baptized (Acts 16:33). Christ’s advice for challenging moments: let the Lord speak through you.

Our Lord continues by listing some very severe assaults on faith, truth, love, and hope. “You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death. And you will be hated by all...” (Lk. 21:16,17). He is not talking about light-weight challenges but heart-wrenching circumstances, nothing anyone desires! Challenges are going to come, whether by innuendo or stark brutality, and to all these, the Lord has a universal counsel: “By your patience possess your souls” (vs. 19). At all times, turn and focus on your soul’s health, on patience, and on trust. Then your life can be an intact, impregnable testimony.

Realize the truth in the Master’s prophecy: “And you will be hated by all for My name’s sake” (vs. 17.). This second declaration is spoken to the entire Body of Christ, to the Church - to all of us. Individually, you and I may not bear the brunt of hatred, yet know that even now there are those in this world who hate us, even if they do not know our names, addresses, and phone numbers. Also, if we should fail as a witness some time or miss a lesser “...occasion for testimony” (vs. 13), do not despair. Follow the admonition of the Lord’s second counsel: develop patience within you as long as you are in this world. The first counsel is for moments of challenge; by all means, let the second counsel operate continuously within.

It is obvious that our Lord expects us to work at acquiring patience. We have to learn to control our inner life, hearts and souls. Thus, He speaks of ‘our’ patience. Of course, we are fools if we think that we can make patience our own without His grace. Listen to Saint Gregory of Sinai: “With regard to patience the Lord says: ‘You will gain possession of your souls through your patient endurance’ (Lk. 21:19). He did not say through your fasting or through your vigils. I refer to the patience bestowed by God, which is the queen of virtues, the foundation of courageous actions. Patience is peace amid strife, serenity amid distress, and a steadfast base for those who acquire it.” See, growth in these virtues is a cooperative work with God. We practice, accepting whatever comes in life as from the Lord - as His perfect will for us. Then, He graciously fills us with unwavering, durable, steady patience. Labor continuously; grow steadily.

Lord, help me receive the cleansing fires of life from Thee and patiently possess my soul.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

November 27 – Thursday of the Twenty-seventh Week after Pentecost
Luke 18:31-34

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

November 29 – Saturday of the Twenty-seventh Week after Pentecost
Luke 10:19-21

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

November 30 – Twenty-seventh Sunday after Pentecost
Luke 13:10-17

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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