

October 1 – Thursday of the Eighteenth Week after Pentecost
Ephesians 5:33-6:9

The Seal of the Spirit, continued – Sincerity of Heart: *Ephesians 5:33-6:9, especially vss. 5- 6:* “*Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters . . . in sincerity of heart, as to Christ . . . doing the will of God from the heart. . .*” In the Epistle to the Ephesians, Saint Paul’s recurring theme is the importance of imparting grace to others – not just receiving God’s grace, but sharing it.

As Saint Paul continues his emphasis on the sharing of grace, he directs our attention specifically to the relationship between parents and children, and that of slaves and masters. In the exhortation quoted above, he speaks of “sincerity of heart” (vs. 5). Although he mentions this gift in speaking of slaves and masters, it applies equally in his counsel to parents and children.

What blessings come with singleness of heart! How many parents struggle to help their children learn to practice gracious, glad obedience in the place of grudging compliance! It takes effort, discernment, and grace to teach glad obedience, for before a child can give joyous assent, there must be sincerity of heart between parent and child. Somehow, the child’s heart must be awakened and united to the parents’ hearts. Yet this goal proves maddeningly elusive at times.

As we review Saint Paul’s admonitions to children (vss. 6:1-3), his words are particularly helpful for understanding the relationship between the seal of the Holy Spirit and sincerity of heart. After all, why do parents baptize their children and have them sealed in holy chrismation? The baptismal mystery initiates us into the Christian life: it begins with a “turning away” followed by a “turning to,” in reverse of the order of fallen life.

Facing to the west (the outer door of the church), the candidate renounces “Satan, and all his angels, and all his works, and all his service, and all his pride.” Likewise, facing east (toward the Altar), the candidate unites himself to Christ as “King and God.” The candidate declares himself a Christian through these acts, and disconnects from every realm ruled by Satan: the world, the flesh, the passions, and their service. As a personal choice, he embraces the effort of a life joined to Christ as Lord.

To undertake this reverse orientation and remain ever true to Christ, our hearts must be committed to Christ first and foremost. In the original Greek text of verse 5, the word *aplótetē* (“sincerity”) connotes “singleness, simplicity, being uncompounded, pure, or even sound.” The Lord requires this of us, for “no one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon” (Mt 6:24).

Why, then, do we turn away from what is necessary for our life in Christ? We can readily see the futility of serving the evil one and his demands. Our heart yearns to serve Christ alone, to incarnate the seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit, to become fruitful by rejecting darkness, lies, and death. Even if our heart is drowning in the raging sea of the passions, we grasp the hand of the Savior (Mt 14:30).

This sincerity of heart also applies to parents who desire glad obedience from their children. Thus the Apostle Paul admonishes parents not to provoke their children to wrath, but rather to “bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord” (vs. 4) and “in sincerity of heart” (vs. 5).

When the apostle speaks to slaves and masters, he reminds us that we are all related to each other “according to the flesh” (vs. 5). He reframes the relations between worker and employer by introducing a third party into the relationship, the Lord Jesus Christ. We are to serve “as to Christ” Himself, with sincerity of heart (vs. 5), for the Master of *all* is Christ (vss. 7, 9).

O Christ, our God, may we ever prove ourselves single-hearted children of the Light.

October 2 - Friday of the Eighteenth Week after Pentecost
Ephesians 6:18-24

The Seal of the Spirit, continued – Pray Always: *Ephesians 6:18-24, especially vs. 18*: “*Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints. . . .*” As Saint Paul concludes his letter to the Ephesians, he continues with a theme found throughout the epistle: everything should be done “in the Spirit” in whom the faithful are sealed (vs. 18). Also evident is his desire to impart the grace he has received from the Lord, for he sends Tychicus “to comfort [the] hearts” of the Ephesians (vs. 22).

The apostle displays his readiness to submit to the will of God, even while suffering arrest and chains (vs. 20). He again mentions again “the mystery of the gospel” (vs. 19) and the need for “sincerity” or *aphtharsía* (vs. 24).

The noticeably new element in today’s passage is Saint Paul’s admonition to pray. Prayer is essential for all who are sealed in the Spirit, since it leads the way to sincerity of heart, the desire to impart grace to others, and the submission of our will to God.

The apostle admonishes us to “[pray] always” (vs. 18). Prayer is the constant of our life in Christ, for by its nature true prayer is “the converse and union of man with God,” as Saint John Climacus says (*Ladder of Divine Ascent* 28.1, p. 212).

Susceptible as we are to distraction, deception, and delusion, conversation and union with God are necessary if we would seek purity of heart. The aim of prayer is to concentrate our hearts on God until we are one: “I in them, and You in Me, that they may be made perfect in one” (Jn 17:23).

After all, who but God can purify us? “Until we have acquired genuine prayer, we are like people teaching children to begin to walk” (*Ladder* 28.16, p. 214). We need to be patient and persistent, ever alert and persevering (Eph 6:18), for prayer helps us discern those things which draw us away from God. Through the mighty aid of the Spirit, prayer helps us banish the thoughts that inevitably assail our efforts to remain united to the Lord.

These benefits of prayer led the Fathers to teach *monologia*, or “singleness of thought.” The Jesus Prayer is the best-known form of *monologia*. Regular use of the simple Jesus prayer reveals our scattered spiritual condition. But if we persist in the struggle to pray, we discover that “what is obtained by frequent and prolonged prayer is lasting” (*Ladder* 28.40, p. 217).

What do we obtain from constant prayer? First of all, it leads to singleness or sincerity of heart. Prayer in the Spirit discloses the confusion of our mixed motives and helps us distinguish between what comes from God and what comes from our passions, or demonic suggestion.

Persisting in prayer may be likened to clarifying butter: a slow, protracted heating causes the solids and impurities to rise to the surface, where they may be skimmed off. As we pray persistently, our soul warms and is gradually cleansed until the heart reaches *aphtharsía*: singleness and purity.

Prayer also nurtures a desire to impart grace to others. The consistent mark of one who is a vehicle of grace is a life saturated in prayer. Thus, the words and deeds of those who pray ceaselessly conform to the Lord’s will, and grace is imparted according to the need of those they meet.

Prayer also illumines us to perceive our place in the Body of Christ. We readily submit to others. As Saint John Climacus says, our good King may distribute His gifts Himself, yet often they come “through a friend, and sometimes through a slave” (*Ladder* 28.17, p. 214).

O Lord, direct my will; teach me to pray; pray Thou Thyself in me. – Saint Philaret of Moscow

October 3 – Saturday of the Eighteenth Week after Pentecost
1 Corinthians 15:39-45

The Spiritual Body: 1 Corinthians 15:39-45, especially vs. 44: *“There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.”* In the Nicene Creed, we recite the words, “I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.” What sort of statement is this? As a declaration in the Creed, it is considered dogma by the Church, and requires trust and commitment of us as disciples of the Lord. This divinely revealed truth should encourage us as we survey life and death, anticipating the corruption that will overtake our bodies in the grave, for “man is naked bones, food for the worms, and stench.”

To say, “I look for the resurrection of the dead,” is to speak with a confidence that contradicts the corruption and stench inside the tomb. Our affirmation in no way denies the grave and dissolution but looks beyond these toward “the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the age to come.”

Our present age offers the termination of life, but Christ offers eternal life. “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (Jn 14:6). “All that the Father gives Me will come to Me; and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him that sent Me. This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day” (Jn 6:37-39). The Master teaches us to look toward the resurrection and strive for life eternal.

Saint Paul, being firm in his faith, readily accepts the necessity of death for our present fleshly bodies: “Foolish one, what you sow is not made alive unless it dies” (1 Cor 15:36). Corruption follows from our membership in the human race, for we are children of Adam and “in Adam all die” (vs. 22). Death is our heritage on account of our sin, which cut us off from life. We share in the temporal dishonor that befalls the whole human race (vs. 43). Our poor, mortal body is frail, for “it is sown in weakness” (vs. 43).

According to Archbishop Lazar Puhalo, “Death is the enemy of mankind, and a source of the utmost confusion and dread to a humanity deprived of true, Christian hope. The idea that death is a final end of all human existence is also a source of avarice, self-centeredness, the worship and exaltation of the passions and the desire to feed the sensual pleasures to the utmost in this life” (*The Soul, the Body, and Death*, p. 2).

This statement deepens the basis for the Nicene affirmation by exposing all societies as “cultures of death.” And yet we affirm, “I look for the resurrection of the dead.”

What encourages us to look for the life of the world to come? The future spiritual body and the resurrection are revealed and offered to us by the Lord Jesus (1 Jn 3:2). In His great mercy and compassion, He created us out of nothing – for this life, but ultimately for the “life to come.”

In other words, our expectation of this life to come is not based on a creedal statement, nor even an apostle’s declaration. First and foremost, we anticipate a resurrected body because Christ – the Lord we know, to whom we are united – “became a life-giving spirit” (vs. 45). He reveals this “spiritual body” to us in the eleven Resurrection gospels which the Church reads every Sunday at Orthros.

As Saint Ephraim the Syrian exclaims, “The body’s fettered feet will leap in Paradise. Its paralyzed hands will pluck the fruit, even all good things. Its blinded eyes will behold Him that enlightens all. Its silenced mouth will again be opened. Its sealed ears will hear the trumpet. And its corrupted flesh will glisten with glory. May both body and soul . . . chant hymns in Thy Paradise” (Puhalo, p. 114).

Blessed is the way in which thou shalt walk today; for a place of rest is prepared for thee. – Orthodox Funeral Service

October 4 - Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost
2 Corinthians 9:6-11

Seeds of the Kingdom: 2 Corinthians 9:6-11, especially vs. 6: “He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.” In using the imagery of planting in today’s passage, the Apostle Paul draws our imagination to germination, growth, fruition, and yield – the mystery of life as seen in field and garden. But to which field or garden does the Apostle refer?

While his main theme is generosity, good works, and aid to the poor (vss. 8-9, 11), nevertheless he also speaks of the yield that God gives to the sower and donor: love and blessings from God (vss. 7-8); an enduring righteousness, necessary resources, and even abundance (vss. 9-10). Saint Paul directs our attention to those who do good works and on what happens in the spiritual life of the generous and in the hearts of those who help others in need.

What is most important for us as we strive to live for Christ? As with field and garden, both scarcity and bounty are constant possibilities that affect our giving and helping. As the apostle says, we choose when we give. However, let us remember that God is concerned with our heart as we care for others.

Our actions cultivate either a loving heart or a stony one, blessings or sterility, spiritual riches or dullness, plenty or blight. The wise gardener and prudent farmer takes good seed in hand to sow for a bountiful harvest. Similarly, an obedient servant is careful to use the Lord’s select seed to sprout and mature under divine cultivation. Where do we find this quality seed that promises us abundant life in Christ?

What is the seed described in the Parable of the Sower (Mt 13: 3-9)? Christ Jesus calls it “the word of the kingdom” (vs. 19). He thus indicates how we are to live and offers His wisdom to His servants as we set out to sow His word.

For Christ “is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work” (2 Cor 9:8). The Lord Jesus begins His ministry by saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Mt 4:17), and then immediately He adds: “Follow Me” (vs. 19).

In The Sermon on the Mount, we find an abundance of these “words of the kingdom.” These guides and commandments spell out how we are to follow Him. First, He tells us to “let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Mt 5:16).

Christ’s directives also uphold and expand God’s ancient commandments. “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder.’ . . . But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment” (Mt 5:21-22).

And, “if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift” (Mt 5:23-24).

Just as Christ deepens our understanding of the Law in spiritual terms, so Saint Paul advises us to rid ourselves of all reluctance and compulsion. The freedom of our life in Christ arises from sowing the word of His kingdom in our hearts without sparing, so that our harvest may be bountiful in cheerfulness and giving love without stint (2 Cor 9:7).

The seeds of the kingdom make us satisfied with what we have (vs. 8): a lasting, inner peace because of the great gift of Christ Himself. We are “enriched in every way for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God” (vs. 11). May God help us to open our hearts to the Lord Jesus, and to sow His life richly within us and all around us.

O Life and sweet breath of mine, I was in darkness and Thy sweet voice awakened me. – Elder Joseph the Hesychast

October 5 – Monday of the Nineteenth Week after Pentecost
Philippians 1:1-7

A Martyr's Heart – Gratitude for Fellowship: *Philippians 1:1-7, especially vs. 7*: *"I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace."* Today begins a series reading through the Epistle to the Philippians, a letter written by Saint Paul while enduring house arrest under supervision of the imperial guard at Rome. He was awaiting trial after appealing to the emperor's court as a Roman citizen (see Acts 26:32-27:1; 28:16-30).

Saint Paul expects that he will be released, yet the possibility of a death sentence cannot be ruled out. The Philippians have sent funds to the apostle via Epaphroditus, a member of the church at Philippi (Phil 2:25). The gift is for the apostle's personal support during his detention. Clearly, Philippians is Saint Paul's "thank you letter," but it also provides great insight into the heart of the true Christian facing possible martyrdom.

The letter reveals the close bond between Saint Paul and the faithful at Philippi (vs. 1:1). As he declares, he knows that they are partakers with him of God's grace: both in his chains and in his defense of the gospel before the Roman court (vs. 7). He is blessed and joyful (vs. 4), even though his trial carries the potential for a sentence of death. Whatever the outcome, Saint Paul expresses gratitude for the bond of love he shares with the community at Philippi.

A mark of the Christian martyrs when facing death is the knowledge that he or she is not alone. Paul's heart is sustained by a caring fellowship even in dark, uncertain times fraught with the possibility of pain and death.

Let us consider the full impact of that fellowship on the apostle's heart. He begins, "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you" (vs. 3). In our parishes, when a family offers the holy bread for the Divine Liturgy, they provide the priest with the names of family members to be remembered during preparation of the Holy Gifts.

At the service of the proskomedia (preparation), the priest also remembers our Lord, the holy Theotokos, the great angelic hosts, the holy prophets, the glorious apostles, hierarchs, martyrs, ascetical fathers, wonder-working unmercenary healers, the bishop and clergy of the Church, along with the reposed brethren whom God has called to Himself.

How thankful we should be when our loved ones are remembered in the company of such a grace-filled fellowship! Every true Christian knows heartfelt gratitude to God for belonging to such a glorious, loving, and supportive communion of the saints.

Saint Paul remembers with gratitude the loving family in Philippi who cared for his material needs. He knows them as a caring community, for God had accomplished a great work in their hearts (vs. 6). They have turned from darkness to light, responding in faith and love to the truth, committing themselves to God for all eternity.

The apostle is confident that God "who [had] begun a good work in [them would] complete it until the day of Jesus Christ" (vs. 6). Christians know that whatever God begins, He finishes. He remains at work through his worldwide fellowship until the Lord Jesus returns.

Finally, as Saint Paul remembers his Philippian family, he is filled with longing for their warm companionship. Such an attachment is natural in our mature Christian relationships, especially in the face of the extremity of martyrdom. Let us pray that our longing for the gracious fellowship of our brothers and sisters in Christ may always reflect the deep, abiding affection we receive from the Lord Himself (vs. 8) – the love that sustains us all.

O Thou Lover of souls, grant to the fellowship of Thy beloved ones, Thy rich mercy. – Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom

October 6 – Tuesday of the Nineteenth Week after Pentecost
Philippians 1:8-14

A Martyr's Heart, continued – Love Abounds: *Philippians 1:8-14, especially vs. 9:* “*And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more. . .*” In Philippians 1:1-7, we see the supportive love of a gracious fellowship – a blessing for the Apostle Paul as he awaits the outcome of his trial before the imperial court. No wonder he prays that love will continue to develop and abound among the faithful at Philippi! By his holy prayers, may this same love abound within our faith communities, and among all who profess Christ.

However, we must not sentimentalize this prayer, but rightly grasp the apostle's meaning. He knows that “there are those who love without reason, simply and anyhow, whence it comes that such friendships are weak. . . . For there is danger lest anyone be spoiled by the love of the heretics,” says Saint John Chrysostom (“Homily 2 on Philippians,” *NPNF First Series*, Vol. 13, p. 189). Along with heretics, we might also include secularists, materialists, and the immoral.

Saint Paul names six stages through which love must pass in order to abound “to the glory and praise of God” (vs. 11). First, mature love in Christ abounds “in knowledge” (vs. 9). The apostle has a lofty knowledge in mind, for the prefix he adds to the Greek word points beyond ordinary knowledge toward understanding without fault or deficiency. This true knowledge copes with life's circumstances “according to the will of God.” Love in Christ knows the gospel and sees the “knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor 4:6). Such knowledge from God helps us overcome the limitations of human reasoning.

Second, Saint Paul prays that love among the Philippians may abound in “all discernment” (Phil 1:9). The Church Fathers insist upon discernment, because an angel of darkness may disguise himself so as to appear as an angel of light. If we give or receive love without discernment, it may steer us onto treacherous shoals or even shipwreck. The apostle exhorts us to test and prove whatever we encounter in order to identify differences (vs. 10).

Third, while love requires the discernment to choose between good and bad actions, God-inspired *discrimination* is needed if we are to choose between seemingly “good” options. In this arena, human reasoning is highly susceptible to error. Mature Christian love equips us to distinguish acts that may be correct, yet still violate those with weaker consciences (see 1 Cor 8).

What we seek to achieve, through a “love that abounds,” are actions that are pure and *blameless* (Phil 1:10). The Greek word translated as “blameless” means “free of elements that would likely cause another to stumble” (see 1 Cor 10:32). The aim of pure and mature Christian love is to “abstain from every form of evil” (1 Thes 5:22).

When a person's love abounds in knowledge, discrimination, and discernment, such love is “filled with the fruits of *righteousness*” (Phil 1:11). This, in turn, fulfills the Apostle James' words: “the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by them who make peace” (Jas 3:18). The fruits of righteousness are what allow the virtues in the Beatitudes (Mt 5:3-12) to flourish, for disciples who practice them abound in the love of the Lord.

Finally, once love takes these steps “which are by Jesus Christ,” it abounds “to the glory and praise of God” (Phil 1:11). If our love does not in some way commend Christ to others, then it is not whole, and we need to turn in repentance to Him who is above all.

O loving Christ, by the power of Thy love preserve me from every word or deed that corrupts the soul and is hurtful to my brother man. Inspire what I say and how I speak. – Archimandrite Sophrony Sakharov

October 7 - Wednesday of the Nineteenth Week after Pentecost
Philippians 1:12-20

A Martyr's Heart, continued – To Magnify Christ: *Philippians 1:12-20, especially vs. 20:* “*As always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death.*” In his letter to the Philippians, Saint Paul speaks of the possibility of a death sentence in his forthcoming trial, thereby disclosing a martyr's heart. His words teach us the mark of a victor in Christ: not fearlessness so much as the firm belief that whatever trials one may experience, God will be glorified. “Whether by life or by death,” Saint Paul knows the outcome of his trial will magnify Christ (vs. 20).

The Church bids us embrace the apostle's conviction, which is why at Orthodox weddings we hear this prayer: “Ye holy martyrs, who fought the good fight and have received your crowns: entreat ye the Lord that He will have mercy on our souls.”

By his conviction of the efficacy of faith, the Apostle Paul remains confident that he will remain true to God, no matter what may befall him, and will use those events “for the furtherance of the gospel” (vs. 12). The underlying truth is that the Lord's Passion and Resurrection are the prototype of every trial of faith.

As disciples, we too will find our faith tried “in Christ” (vs. 13). We should remember that God overcomes defeat, as He did at the Cross, and triumphs over our enemy: “He has trampled down death by death, and upon those in the tombs bestowing life.”

In light of the Lord Jesus' Passion and Resurrection, we may embrace our own faith struggles, trusting in His greater victory. Even though the apostle is being held prisoner, he says, “It has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ” (vs. 13).

Naturally, Saint Paul's brothers in Christ became “more bold to speak the word without fear” (vs. 14). The power of God is so pervasive that even those who preach for selfish reasons actually further the proclamation of the Lord (vs. 18).

The conviction that “all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose” (Rom 8:28) brings assurance of salvation for the faithful (Phil 1:19). Thus, Saint Paul may say confidently, “I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ” (vs. 19).

Still, the apostle has no illusions. With respect to his immediate situation – his trial before Caesar's court – he knows he may be condemned. Thus, in the very next verse, he adds, “Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death” (vs. 20). His belief arises out of a heart and soul undefiled before God; he begs the prayers of the Philippians, as well as the help of the Holy Spirit, to achieve this highest goal (vs. 19).

Saint Paul's reference to the Holy Spirit's support of the Church (vs. 19) further illustrates his desire to magnify Christ, “whether by life or by death” (vs. 20), and his complete dependence on God. In our trials, if we disdain the prayers of the faithful and forget the presence of the Holy Spirit, we “shall be ashamed” (vs. 20). Instead, let us remember the cry of the Prophet David: “Who will rise up for me against the evil-doers? Or who will stand up with me against the workers of iniquity?” (Ps 93:16).

“In times of need, we ask the Church to implore God on our behalf; we seek the Holy Spirit's guidance, affirm the conviction of efficacy, and believe that our afflictions will be used by the Lord Jesus to bear witness to the faith. Thus shall we be saved! Indeed, let us never forget the outcome of David's trials: “Thy mercy, O Lord, brought help unto me” (Ps 93:18).

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

October 8 – Thursday of the Nineteenth Week after Pentecost
Philippians 1:20-27

A Martyr's Heart, continued – The Joy of Faith: *Philippians 1:20-27, especially vs. 25*: “*And being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith.*” The expression “joy of faith” (vs. 25) expresses the close connection between faith and joy, for both are gifts of God. Faith teaches that God acts graciously on our behalf, overcoming our captivity to sin so that our mouth may be “filled with joy, and our tongue with rejoicing” (Ps 125:2). By faith, if we “sow with tears” of repentance, we “shall reap with rejoicing” (vs. 6).

Note that in today's passage the Apostle Paul is sharing a personal confidence: he “shall remain” in the flesh (Phil 1:24). That is, he shall *continue* in this life after his trial and be able once again to minister to the Philippian congregation (vs. 25). Thus he admits to being confident of survival, despite a potential death sentence (vs. 21). In this way he encourages his beloved people to progress in their faith so that they, too, might realize deep and abiding joy (vs. 25).

As we explore the nature of a martyr's heart through Saint Paul's words in the first chapter of Philippians, we see that such a mature faith is the common heritage for all of us faithful. Should not the “joy of faith” also be the lot of Christ's people (vs. 25)?

If we are tempted to base our hope on the goods of this temporal life, then we ought to heed Solomon's warning: “Sorrow does not mingle with gladness, but in the end, this joy turns to sorrow” (Prov 14:13). Given God's enduring gifts to us – the Cross and the Resurrection, which provide a true foundation for joy – it is sad when we depend upon fluctuating circumstances as the source of our happiness. Such dependence and instability in our faith runs contrary to God's will.

Instead, let us anchor ourselves to an abiding source of joy: the eternal God. In Him we need not fear the ups and downs of life: “Behold, God is my Savior and Lord. I will trust in Him and be saved by Him. I will not be afraid, for the Lord is my glory and my praise. He has become my salvation” (Is 12:2).

The Lord Jesus makes it abundantly clear that He has come to establish deep, abiding joy in His people. At the Last Supper, He says: “These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full” (Jn 15:11). He speaks of the joy that cannot be diminished by the instability of this present life.

Christ's parable tells us that “the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man hath found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has, and buys that field” (Mt 13:44). Let us invest our life and love and every treasure in the garden of the Kingdom! In the Epistle to the Hebrews, the Apostle Paul further encourages us: “Leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God” (Heb 6:1).

According to Saint Diadochos of Photiki, “Initiatory joy is one thing, the joy of perfection is another. The first is not exempt from fantasy, while the second has the strength of humility. Between the two joys comes a ‘godly sorrow’ (2 Cor 7:10) and active tears. . . . In this manner, the soul is tested by divine rebuke as in a furnace, and through fervent remembrance of God it actively experiences the joy exempt from fantasy.” (*Philokalia* vol. 1, p. 271).

Here we find the true way to experience the “joy of faith.” We are to “lament and mourn and weep! Let [our] laughter be turned to mourning, and [our] joy to gloom . . . and [the Lord] will lift [us] up” (Jas 4:9-10).

Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation, and with Thy governing Spirit establish me. – Psalm 50:12

October 9 - Friday of the Nineteenth Week after Pentecost
Philippians 1:27-2:4

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

October 10 - Saturday of the Nineteenth Week after Pentecost
1 Corinthians 15:58-16:3

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

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

Of equal importance, in today’s reading Saint Paul teaches about two of God’s purposes for money. The apostle’s emphasis on sharing among the faithful (Rom 15:27) directs us to the first of God’s purposes for money: wealth should be used to strengthen fellowship among the brethren.

By His self-offering in Christ, God purified “for Himself His own special people zealous for good works” (Ti 2:14). Among those works, in particular, is “distributing to the needs of the saints” (Rom 12:13).

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

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

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

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

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

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

October 11 - Sunday of the Fathers of the Seventh Ecumenical Council
Titus 3:8-15

Maintain Good Works: Titus 3:8-15, especially vs. 8: *“Those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works.”* In this epistle Saint Paul twice emphasizes the need for Christians, “our people” (vs. 14), to maintain good works. We are to perform that which we profess. To believe in God must result in good, observable, tangible actions, or else our belief lacks true commitment to God. To trust the Lord is to take Him at His word and put His commandments and truths into practice. Converting belief into action is evidence of commitment. The Apostle Paul, in urging Titus to “let our people also learn to maintain good works” (vs 14), *expects* trust in God to result in the best kind of activities.

What good works are expected of Christians? The passage identifies three: we are to 1) benefit mankind (vs 9); 2) seek to be reconciled to other Christians (vss 9,10); and 3) assure that those who work for the Church lack no necessities (vs 13). The first applies to people in general (to those in or out of the Church), and the other two good works are to be performed on behalf of “our people” (v 14), ie, the faithful, but especially those who serve the Church.

First, we are to touch the lives of all our fellow men for their benefit. The second time the Apostle speaks of maintaining good works, he extends the thought by adding, “to meet urgent needs” (vs 14). This has career implications for each of us. We are to choose a career with conscious desire to benefit others rather than merely to enhance ourselves. The language of “profit and loss” and “the bottom line” floods the common vocabulary, and these indicate that a great majority in society live, first of all, to profit themselves. True Christians, however, are oriented - as is our God and Savior - toward the good and the salvation of all the world (Jn 3:17).

Hopefully, a Christian’s employment will be a good work in itself, but of most benefit is the primary decision to speak and act consistently so that the very manner of our life encourages and strengthens others in their day-to-day struggles. There are great, urgent needs all around us, which impel agreeing with Saint Paul: “let our people...learn to maintain good works” (Tts 3:14). If we choose, then we can learn a host of ways to benefit and encourage others.

The second good work of all the faithful is to maintain reconciliation among ourselves, a work that derives from God and His reconciling work in Christ. Reconciliation requires that we avoid quizzing, contending, and striving (vs 9). Let us make genuine, serious efforts to conciliate “divisive” persons (vs 10). Yet, note what the Apostle adds: if kind and firm interventions fail, we are to “Reject” such people (vs 10). The Lord Himself outlines a sequence of reconciling efforts that detail the steps Saint Paul describes here (see Mt 18:15-17).

Finally, the Christian committed to maintaining good works dedicates himself especially to benefiting those who take up the work of the Church. These must lack nothing they require to live and carry out their tasks and responsibilities. The Apostle’s admonition directs us to those having special vocations in the Church: clergy, monastics, missionaries, seminarians, social workers, catechists, teachers, musicians, maintenance personnel, parish council members, and a host of others. It is unconscionable to applaud and send workers off “on their journey with haste” (vs 13) if we do not see to it that their labors are supported realistically and tangibly.

Good works are to be maintained with love (vs 15), for, as Saint Paul says, “though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor...but have not love, it profits me nothing” (1 Cor 13:3). Of course, before all else we need God’s grace if we hope to do loving and good works (Tts 3:15).

Thou, my Lord, didst come as Light to the world, a holy Light, turning us who praise Thee away from abysmal folly so that by Thy grace we may maintain good works of love for all.

October 12 - Monday of the Twentieth Week after Pentecost
Philippians 2:12-15

Apostolic Admonitions – Work Out Your Salvation: *Philippians 2:12-15, especially vs. 12:* “*Therefore, my beloved . . . work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. . . .*” The present passage continues our readings through Philippians – the Apostle Paul’s letter of appreciation to the Christians at Philippi. Saint Paul received financial aid from them for his personal maintenance while in custody awaiting trial. However, being a good father in Christ, he also takes an opportunity to counsel his beloved congregation concerning their salvation.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

October 13 - Tuesday of the Twentieth Week after Pentecost
Philippians 2:16-23

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

Reading between the lines, we see strong mutual concern manifested in these comments. Saint Paul not only voices his concerns verbally, but also alludes to forms of tangible care for the family of faith: financial aid, couriers covering long distances, personal visits.

As we examine today’s reading, let us be alert to the kind of concern shared by true brethren in the faith. The apostle admonishes us to love not only in words and precepts, but by tangible action.

If we are to care for our fellow Christians, we must offer our own “blood, and sweat, and tears, and toil,” to use the words of Winston Churchill. The apostle employs the image of a libation (vs. 17) to transform his personal struggles into an offering to God on behalf of the Philippians.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

October 14 - Wednesday of the Twentieth Week after Pentecost
Philippians 2:24-30

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

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

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

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

Let us also esteem those who are compassionate like Epaphroditus, who “for the work of Christ . . . came close to death, not regarding his life, to supply what was lacking” to the Apostle Paul (vs. 30). When he learned that his fellow Christians at Philippi were concerned for him, because they “heard that he was sick,” Epaphroditus is further distressed by their worries on his behalf (vs. 26).

We have pastors who night and day respond to requests for prayers, counsel, and support. God bless those who hear the confessions of their people with compassion, sharing Christ’s love and send penitents away with “no further care” for the sins they have confessed. Indeed, the Lord blesses every Christian who consoles, listens, brings a dish of food to one in need, or simply smiles to give encouragement.

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

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

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

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

October 15 - Thursday of the Twentieth Week after Pentecost
Philippians 3:1-8

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

October 16 - Friday of the Twentieth Week after Pentecost
Philippians 3:8-19

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

October 17 - Saturday of the Twentieth Week after Pentecost
2 Corinthians 1:8-11

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

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

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

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

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

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

Even when we are sensitive to the assaults of pain and death, the Lord reminds us to “seek first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness” (Mt 6:33), and to fear “Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (vs. 10:28). According to Saint Nikolai of Zicha, we can kill the soul by if we pamper the body, allowing it to occupy “itself with love for worldly riches,” or if we “[steal] the time, care or toil that you should devote to the soul and [give] them to the body” (*Homilies*, Vol. 2, p. 120).

How frankly Saint Paul admits his dependency on God for his deliverance (2 Cor 1:9-10)! Every Christian ought to affirm that our deliverance from the trials of this life is a grace from God. In fact, God’s grace – together with our prayers and those of fellow Christians – has great bearing on our eternal salvation, as well as our safety in this present life.

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

We turn first to God, “whom we trust that He will still deliver us” (vs. 10). We then offer pleas to the saints, who surely have the Lord’s ear, and to the Theotokos, the Mother of our God.

Finally, we seek concerted help “together in prayer” (vs. 11) from friends strong in faith. Indeed, we heed Saint Paul and welcome the support of godly prayers from all our true partners in the faith.

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

October 18 - Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost
Galatians 1:11-19

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

To come face to face with the living God, however that occurs, is a humbling, wondrous, life-changing experience. In Holy Scripture we find many reports of men and women who met the Lord and found their lives forever changed. In Saint Paul’s case, a face-to-face confrontation with God enlightened his inner being and illumined the darkness of his hatred and self-righteousness.

God changed Saul of Tarsus from a mere man into a holy apostle. After his baptism, Saint Paul withdrew into Arabia and avoided the centers of Christian activity. He had faced the Lord Jesus, and he needed time to assimilate all that had changed within himself.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

October 19 - Monday of the Twenty-first Week after Pentecost
Philippians 4:10-23

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

October 20 - Tuesday of the Twenty-first Week after Pentecost
Colossians 1:1-3, 7-11

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

October 21 - Wednesday of the Twenty-first Week after Pentecost
Colossians 1:18-23

The Head of the Church: Colossians 1:18-23, especially vs. 18: “*And [Christ Jesus] is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.*” The term “head” indicates a leader or ruler, such as a department head, head of operations, or head of state. Roman Catholics sometimes call the pope the head of the Church, although strictly speaking his title is Vicar of Christ, the Lord Jesus being the true “head of the body, the church” (vs. 18).

In one respect, every clergyman with pastoral oversight of a parish or diocese may rightly be called the head of *a* church. But here the apostle says of Christ that “He is the head of the body, the church” (vs. 18). Hence, *all* clergy serve as vicars of the Lord Jesus. They represent Him who has “preeminence” (vs. 18).

In this passage, how does Apostle Paul describe Christ when he calls Him “the head”? First, he speaks of Christ Jesus as “the beginning, the firstborn from the dead” (vs. 18), in whom “all the fullness should dwell” (vs. 19). He is the One God determined “to reconcile all things to Himself” (vs. 20), who “made peace through the blood of His cross” (vs. 20).

To call Christ “the beginning” (vs. 18) points in two directions: toward His divine personhood as God, and toward the humanity through which He undertook our salvation. All creation, seen and unseen, has its source in Him as God. He is the beginning of all things.

With respect to the creation, the Apostle John says, “He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made” (Jn 1:2-3).

At the same time, let us also consider the Lord Jesus as a man. The wording of the festal hymn of the Annunciation calls his incarnation “the beginning of our salvation, and the manifestation of the mystery from the ages, for the Son of God becometh the Son of the Virgin, and Gabriel proclaimeth grace.” In a special way, by becoming one of us, He launches salvation.

Because the timeless Son of God assumes flesh and has a beginning in time, the Apostle Paul is able to call Christ “the firstborn from the dead” (Col 1:18). Theodore of Mopsuestia asserts that “when Paul says ‘firstborn from the dead,’ it is clear that he is referring to the assumed humanity of Christ” (*Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, New Testament Vol. 9, pp. 18-19).

The saint’s words are an occasion for joy, for at the end of the age many will be resurrected to join the Head of the Church. Let us keep both the Lord Jesus’ divinity and His humanity in mind as we read, in the present passage, “that in Him all the fullness should dwell” (vs. 19). That divine humanity is the *fullness* of God.

According to Saint John Chrysostom, “The term ‘fullness’ some use of the Godhead, like Saint John said, ‘Of His fullness have all we received.’ That is, whatever was the Son, the whole Son dwelt there, not [merely] a sort of energy” (“Homily 3 on Colossians,” *NPNF* First Series, Vol. 13, p. 27).

God the Son became incarnate “to reconcile all things to Himself . . . whether things on earth or things in heaven” (vs. 20). The Head of the Church is the ultimate reconciler, Divine Reconciliation in the flesh. He “made peace through the blood of His cross” (vs. 20). Although we “once were alienated and enemies” of God (vs. 21), the Lord came as the peacemaker so that He might “present [us] holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight” (vs. 22).

Thy Cross do we adore, O Christ, and Thy holy Resurrection we praise and glorify: for Thou art our God, and we know none other beside Thee; we call upon Thy name. – Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom

October 22 – Thursday of the Twenty-first Week after Pentecost
Colossians 1:24-29

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

October 23 - Friday of the Twenty-first Week after Pentecost
Colossians 2:1-7

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

October 24 – Saturday of the Twenty-first Week after Pentecost
2 Corinthians 3:12-18

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

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

Surely the encounter between Saul of Tarsus and the Lord Jesus on the road to Damascus, when Saul was an active enemy of the Christians (Acts 9:1-9), ought to be read alongside those passages from Exodus and Corinthians. For Christ confronts the future Saint Paul in so powerful and blinding a fashion that He transforms and redirects his life completely, taking away the veil (2 Cor 3:16).

Saint Paul acquires hope and “great boldness of speech” (vs. 12) from his experience, empowering him to communicate forthrightly with us through the centuries. Likewise, Moses is commissioned to deliver the covenant to the people of Israel (Ex 34:27), which he does (vs. 35:1-40:32). Christ’s disciples are shown His glory “as far as they could bear it; so that when they would behold [Him] crucified . . . [they] would proclaim to the world that Thou art truly the radiance of the Father” (festal hymn of the Transfiguration).

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

Whether the Lord God reveals Himself to us in moments of exaltation or those of biting pain and loss of hope, His brilliant radiance transforms, focuses, relieves, and restores hope in us. As with the children of Israel, once the covenant is fixed between us and God, it is established eternally.

Saint Paul makes the point that the Old Testament, being divinely given, is neither wrong nor time-bound. What it lacks is the basic revelation that “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself” (2 Cor 5:19). Moses, however, has to use a veil, lest the radiance from his face discourage or impede faith in Israel (2 Cor 3:13).

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

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

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

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

October 25 – Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost
Galatians 2:16-20

The Life in Christ: *Galatians 2:16-20, especially vs. 20:* “*I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.*” For many years the Archpriest John Iliytch Sergieff, later known as Saint John of Kronstadt, kept a journal of the “edifying thoughts and feelings that came to [him].” Ultimately, these meditations were edited and published as *My Life in Christ*. Surely no text has done more to establish the expression “the life in Christ” in the English-speaking Orthodox world.

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

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

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

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

Saint Paul further asserts that living by external rules is futile (vs. 16). Only when we acknowledge that it is impossible to be justified before God do we actually find the gateway to the life in Christ, to the true faith “in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (vs. 20).

According to Father Paul Tarazi, “This recognition of the necessity of faith is then the prologue to faith” (*Galatians: A Commentary*, p. 85). Once we grasp the limitations of living according to a set of rules, we become ready to “unite [our self] unto Christ” and receive life in Him.

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

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

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

October 26 – Monday of the Twenty-second Week after Pentecost
Colossians 2:13-20

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

October 27 – Tuesday of the Twenty-second Week after Pentecost
Colossians 2:20-3:3

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Let us, who have died with Christ and been raised with Him, seek life from Him alone. May we remember that Christ disparages outward displays of humility – “Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites. . . . For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting” (Mt 6:16) – and humble themselves in our hearts by setting our minds “on things above” (Col 3:2). *Open to me the door of repentance, O Lifegiver, for my soul goeth early to the temple of Thy holiness in the temple of my body, wholly polluted.* – Lenten Verse

October 28 - Wednesday of the Twenty-second Week after Pentecost
Colossians 3:17-4:1

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

October 29 – Thursday of the Twenty-second Week after Pentecost
Colossians 4:2-9

God-Pleasing Speech: Colossians 4:2-9, especially vs. 6: *“Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.”* At creation, God endowed mankind with speech. The Lord’s very method of creating involved speech, for He said, “Let there be light; and there was light” (Gn 1:3). Likewise, He blessed us with a capacity to speak: “And whatever Adam called each living creature, that was its name. So Adam gave names to all” (Gn 2:19-20).

However, when sin entered the world, speech, like our other faculties, became distorted. Still, we have heard the mystery of Christ spoken to us, and we have entered upon the arduous journey of lifting our lives out of the mire of sin and death. And so we can learn to speak as we ought (Col 4:4).

Saint Paul’s Epistle to the Colossians provides the following guidelines that, by divine grace, can help us gain God-pleasing speech. First, we are to “continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant” (vs. 2). Prayer – speaking with God – is the matrix for speaking to others. Hence, with God’s help, we struggle for unceasing prayer (1 Thes 5:17) and thereby purge the evil from what we think and say.

Prayer ought always to be offered “with thanksgiving” (vs. 2). It will then in turn spill over into our earthly conversations with those around us. We also pray “that God would open to us a door for the word” (vs. 3). Among our prayers are intercessions for those in authority over us spiritually, that God would grant them grace to meet the challenges and difficulties of sacred ministry.

“Make . . . manifest the mystery of Christ” (vss. 4, 3). Our speech is meant to disclose our determination that Christ will be seen at work in us! Let us thus strive to speak “in wisdom” (vs. 5). Wisdom is not smarts, nor cleverness, nor a high IQ; we speak from the Lord’s wisdom, for “from His face come knowledge and understanding” (Prv 2:6).

Let our speech be filled “with grace” (Col 4:6)! The restoration of our speech depends upon the grace of God, our willingness to speak as our Creator wills, and our choice to speak solely “in the name of the Lord our God” (Jer 33:16), restraining our passions and fears at whatever cost (Mt 16:24).

Our words are to be “seasoned with salt” (Col 4:6). In one of his Nativity hymns, Saint Ephraim the Syrian proclaims, “Glory be to God on high, who mixed His salt in our minds, His leaven in our souls, His body became bread, to quicken our deadness” – not for the sake of eloquence, but for love and truth.

We must come to “know how . . . to answer each one” (vs. 6). Even with those who provoke, threaten, or make jests about us, or when we are assaulted with corrupt speech, let us depend on Him who teaches us “how . . . to answer.” “Hear Him!” (Mt 17:5).

We are to “make known . . . all things which are happening” (Col 4:9). Let us never gossip, but pray for help for those in need, leave aside the sordid and tantalizing details. May we instead speak according to the loving compassion of the Lord to our eternal relief.

Let us likewise “comfort [others’] hearts” (vs. 8). God became incarnate that He might comfort us in the afflictions and tragedies spawned by our sinfulness. Let us ever be members of the Body of Christ, serving at His direction and reaching out to the suffering and the devastated in this life, both through our speech and also our actions, which speak louder than words.

By Thy grace enable us at all times to speak and act to Thy glory with a pure spirit, with humility, patience, love, gentleness, peace, courage and wisdom: aware always of Thy presence. – Archimandrite Sophrony Sakharov

October 30 - Friday of the Twenty-second Week after Pentecost
Colossians 4:10-18

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

“You cannot be called a Christian if you do not pray often,” declares Archimandrite Ioannikios Kotsonis. “All the saints prayed continually and with ardor. In vain is every spiritual building, every spiritual guard without the presence of the Lord; consequently, in vain is every work of ours without prayer. Prayer makes the presence of the Lord alive and changes every work, which could have been fruitless, into light and glory to the Heavenly Father” (*Themes from the Philokalia* Vol. 1, p. 48).

Saint Paul offers Epaphras as an example to us of one who rightly and fervently “labors” in prayer. He inspires us to labor in like manner if we are to “stand perfect and complete” in God’s will (vs. 4:12). Note that he calls Epaphras a “bondservant” of Christ (vs. 12). The Greek word *doulos* can mean either servant or slave. It emphasizes Epaphras’ complete surrender of his life, fortune, desires, and will to the Lord.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

October 31 – Saturday of the Twenty-second Week after Pentecost
2 Corinthians 5:1-10

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

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

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

What gives the apostle such a great confidence? First, we understand that the earthly *house* (vs. 1) to which the Apostle refers is our physical body, drawn from the elements of this earth. Saint Paul likens the body to the tent or tabernacle that God commanded Moses and the people of Israel to use during their nomadic years: a sanctuary for worship, where He “will appear among you” (Ex 25:8).

Saint Paul deliberately chooses this image to remind us of two things. Our mortal bodies are temporary and easily destroyed (vs. 1), and yet even in this life our bodies may become dwellings for the Holy Spirit, who is eternal (vs. 5). The apostle further contrasts his first image – a mere “tent” – with a building that is “eternal in the heavens” (vs. 1).

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

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

Note the apostle’s next remark: “If indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked” (vs. 3). God intends that we, who have united ourselves to Christ Jesus in the mystery of baptism, should have our mortality “swallowed up by life” (vs. 4). Of course, all of us shall then “appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body” (vs. 10).

Thus, the possibility of being clothed with a heavenly body remains subject to Christ’s judgment. And yet we are encouraged, for we know God’s compassionate intentions and His mercy. Earlier, Saint Paul spoke of our earthly form as a tent (vs. 1) to remind us that our physical bodies are meant to be dwelling places for God. Now he mentions the Spirit of God, the intended divine occupant. “Therefore we make it our aim . . . to be well pleasing to Him” (vs. 9). The Spirit is God’s gift, so that after the judgment we may not fail to be clothed in our heavenly body. Trust the Spirit, and walk with Him now in faith!

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