

November 1 - Twenty-second Sunday after Pentecost
Galatians 6:11-18

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In this reading, Saint Paul offers not a comfortable word but a strong message for us to hear and embrace: “God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (vs. 14).

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

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

November 2 – Monday of the Twenty-third Week after Pentecost
1 Thessalonians 1:1-5

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

November 3 – Tuesday of the Twenty-third Week after Pentecost
1 Thessalonians 1:6-10

Following Christ: 1 Thessalonians 1:6-10, especially vss. 6-7: “*And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became examples to all. . . .*” The lives of the Apostle Paul and of Saint Maximos the Confessor were marked by struggle and pain. Their example challenges us to follow our Lord as they did.

“He who loves Christ is bound to imitate Him to the best of his ability,” insists Saint Maximos. “Christ, for example, was always conferring blessings on people; He was longsuffering when they were ungrateful and blasphemed Him; and when they beat Him and put Him to death, He endured it, imputing no evil at all to anyone. These are the three acts which manifest love for one’s neighbor. If he is incapable of them, the person who says that he loves Christ or has attained the kingdom deceives himself” (*Philokalia* vol. 2, p. 107).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

November 4 - Wednesday of the Twenty-third Week after Pentecost
1 Thessalonians 2:1-8

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

O holy apostles, ye didst sincerely prefer to all things the greatly desired divine love which linketh its lovers to the Beloved. Plead with Him to lighten and save our souls. – Based on a hymn for Saints Peter and Paul

November 5 – Thursday of the Twenty-third Week after Pentecost
1 Thessalonians 2:9-14

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

November 6 - Friday of the Twenty-third Week after Pentecost
1 Thessalonians 2:14-19

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

November 7 - Saturday of the Twenty-second Week after Pentecost
2 Corinthians 8:1-5

As God Wills: 2 Corinthians 8:1-5, especially vs. 5: *“They first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God.”* When Saint Paul wrote this letter, he was completing a collection for famine relief on behalf of the faithful in Judea. He extols the exemplary giving of the churches in Macedonia (vs. 1) in order to encourage the Corinthians to have their offering ready when Titus arrives (vs. 6). By teaching us about the generosity of the Macedonians, this passage may open to us the same grace that God bestowed on them.

The Apostle Paul not only reports that the Macedonians gave abundantly (vs. 2), but frames their generosity like a diamond in a solitaire setting. He calls attention to the living conditions out of which they gave, living as they did in the midst of affliction and deep poverty (vs. 2). Their circumstances and their giving, he suggests, are entirely opposite: abundant giving coming from impoverished donors.

Knowing that everything in the Christian life should be motivated from a pure heart illumined by the gospel, the apostle hastily adds that the Macedonians gave from “the abundance of their joy” (vs. 2). The commendable aspect of their charity is that they gave *joyfully* in the midst of trials and stark limitations.

The Macedonians embraced the gospel and were ready to share in the sufferings of Christ, perceiving their affliction as an opportunity to participate in the Lord Jesus’ Self-offering. This was the source of their “abundance of . . . joy” (vs. 2). They did not ask themselves, “How much can I afford?” but rather exclaimed, “What a joy to share in the sufferings of the Lord who is compassionate toward us, unworthy as we are!”

Next, the Apostle Paul points out that the Macedonians gave “beyond their ability” (vs. 3). This might be expected from his earlier remarks, but now he makes it explicit, connecting what he has reported already with the statement that “they were freely willing” (vs. 3).

Pressure is often applied to donors by appealing to their sense of obligation, guilt, position, or implied benefits. Saint Paul had lived in Macedonia with those poor brethren. He knows their material conditions. He simply informed them of the offering and they gave freely, beyond their ability, without pressure, guilt, or sense of obligation.

There is another surprise here: they implored the apostle “with much urgency” to take their gift and “the fellowship of the ministering to the saints” (vs. 4). Thus Saint Paul highlights what is happening in their hearts as donors. We almost hear their own words through his description: “We are one in fellowship with those suffering hunger, and we yearn to minister to their needs as our privilege and joy.” They manifest the sort of delight that comes from helping a loved one. Clearly, their pleasure arose from the living gospel in their hearts.

Saint Paul’s remaining insight into the giving of the Macedonians is offered as a pastor concerned for his people’s spiritual health, and responsible for the condition of their hearts and souls. He notes that as the churches of Macedonia sent aid, they fully met his desires for their giving “as we had hoped” (vs. 5). However, then he adds: “But they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God” (vs. 5).

Whenever donations are sought – especially when the need appeals to our heart – we may be inclined to give immediately and generously. Not so with the Macedonians: first, they sought direction from the Lord, even when His own apostle was the one asking. They began with prayer so as to be led as the Lord directed them: “first . . . to the Lord” (vs. 5), and only then to the apostles.

Illumine our hearts, O Master who loveth mankind, with the pure light of Thy gospel. – Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom

November 8 - Twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost
Ephesians 2:4-10

God's Love: *Ephesians 2:4-10, especially vs. 4:* “*God . . . is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us. . . .*” The Church reveals God's mercy and love through the holy mysteries, Scripture, the icons, the saints, and the whole of sacred tradition. Those who respond to God's luminous message walk freely in His love and mercy as “fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God” (vs. 19). They know how greatly they are loved and for what purpose they were “created in Christ Jesus” (vs. 10).

In today's passage, the Apostle Paul summarizes the “great love” of God for His people in three declarations: God “made us alive together with Christ” (vs. 5); “raised us up together” in Christ (vs. 6); “and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (vs. 6).

Each assertion of God's love is stated in the past tense, as a fait accompli. God has gone on record to establish His rich mercy and great love for us, so that we, as His workmanship in Christ Jesus, would be able to discharge those “good works which [He] prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (vs. 10).

But if we are to be “made alive,” we must first know that we are dead. Hence, Saint Paul reminds us that “we were dead in trespasses” (vs. 5). He contradicts here the common error of approaching death from the wrong direction, as strictly the end of physical life, the mortality of the body. To limit death this way obscures the profound death of which the apostle speaks. Many of us are “dead” for a time, although we live in an animated body, for spiritual death precedes physical cessation for all who are “in Adam” (1 Cor 15:22).

The God who is rich in mercy and love addresses our condition at its root, saving not just our immortal souls and spirits, but solving once and for all the issue surrounding death: the alienation between our race and God. Every one of us is dead in our separation from the Source of life. Nonetheless, God took our flesh upon Himself through the Theotokos and Ever-virgin Mary, crossing over from the heavenly places (Eph 2:6) to die for us. Life embraced death. He entered the place of the dead, assaulting and tramping down death, and offered life to every mortal.

Are we baptized into Christ? Then, together with the faithful joined to Him, we have “put on Christ” (Gal 3:27). We are now made alive with Him (Eph 2:5), raised up from that death which separates us from God, for He is our life and makes us to sit “in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (vs. 6).

Yes, our bodies will die, but in Christ we are already united to eternal Life. If we will take up the “walk” (vs. 10) for which God created us, ineffable wonders follow.

According to Saint John Chrysostom, “We have been brought from non-existence into being. As to what we were before, that is, the old man, we are dead. What we are now, we were not before. Truly, then, this is a work, a creation, yea, and more noble than the first; for from that one, we have our being; but from this last, we have . . . our wellbeing” (“Homily 4 on Ephesians, *NPNF First Series*, Vol. 13, p. 68).

God has placed us on the road to the city of the Great King. Come, let us walk in good works, not stopping to indulge our flesh that will die. Rather, we join Him in faith and seize the great good that God's grace has accomplished. In His rich mercy and great love for us, we are recreated. Let us do many good works in the name of Him who has given us life.

O Lord, by Thy Holy Spirit, guide us. Bless our comings and our goings; our deeds and works and words and thoughts, that they may praise Thine ineffable beneficence. – Orthros Prayer of the Priest

November 9 - Monday of the Twenty-fourth Week after Pentecost
1 Thessalonians 2:20-3:8

Apostolic Goals – Stand Fast: 1 Thessalonians 2:20-3:8, especially vs. 8: “*For now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord.*” As Orthodox Christians, we seek the intercessions of the apostles for our salvation, but do we consider the goals that the apostles have set for us as disciples of Christ? This week’s epistle readings express the goals Saint Paul seeks to accomplish in the faithful. Let us now consider how following the apostles’ way makes us part of their “glory and joy” (vs. 20).

Over many months and years, the Apostle Paul invested his time in forming congregations, training pastors, and preparing the Christian communities to stand on their own without his presence. He recalls these activities in his letter to the Thessalonians. Later, separated by his travels and lacking today’s means of instant communication, he earnestly wants to know how they are faring. Surely parents of children away at college understand this concern!

Since he is unable to come in person (vs. 18), Saint Paul sends his assistant and fellow apostle Timothy to learn whether the community is bearing fruit. He wants evidence that his God-given ministry continues to function (vs. 3:2). Timothy returns with good news: the Christians in Thessalonica are standing “fast in the Lord” (vs. 8), and Saint Paul is comforted (vs. 7).

How does this apply to us? The apostles’ first goal is that our communities should *stand fast* in grace and in the way of the Lord. Today’s passage indicates how easily we can be “shaken” and even dislodged from our journey with the Lord (vs. 3).

Who among us has not faltered and taken a wrong step? How often do we let pain or troubles steal our peace in Christ? Let us have no illusions; a multitude of forces assault us, distract us, and rudely separate us from the Lord’s path. The question is how, then, are we to *stand fast* in the grace of God?”

First and foremost, we stand by faith (vss. 6-7). Each of us must do our part to build on God’s gift of faith received at our baptism. We rely on the trust the apostles convey to us and beseech their prayers; we struggle to hold fast to the word of life. After many had deserted Jesus, Saint Peter said: “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Jn 6:68-69).

Second, we reframe our understanding of the tribulations that come to every Christian. The Thessalonians who hear of Saint Paul’s tribulation are themselves stressed by dire poverty. Earthly pressures come to us, but the Apostle Paul does not wish us to be dislodged from Christ.

He thus reminds us “that we are appointed to” trials (1 Thes 3:3). We know, furthermore, that trials are appointed by our Lord Jesus Christ for our salvation. We give thanks that God’s hand is ever upon us, knowing that He is especially near when we endure afflictions.

Third, we must determine to reject temptations, which often come in swarms in order to shake us from the gospel (vs. 5). The outcome of each temptation lies within us: the demons play their part, but our flesh is all too ready to listen and cooperate.

We pray to resist when we are drawn into actions that oppose our Lord’s will and His commandments. We confess our weaknesses, asking that His strength prevail. We seek Christ’s grace to resist and overcome the allurements of the world and the flesh. We also ask the holy apostles to intercede for us, as ones tried and true in standing fast.

Finally, we stir up love for the Lord and His apostles. Our love for Him and His love for us is our bulwark against straying (vs. 6). The Lord closely examines Saint Peter in order to anchor him in that love (Jn 21:15-17). Christ awakens love for Him in every heart that asks!

O Holy Apostles, intercede with the merciful God to grant salvation for our souls. – Festal hymn for an apostle

November 10 - Tuesday of the Twenty-fourth Week after Pentecost
1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

Apostolic Goals, continued – Holiness: 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13, especially vss. 12-13: “*And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love . . . so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father. . . .*” In yesterday’s reading, the Apostle Paul explains how to stand fast in the life in Christ. He outlines the relationship of steadfastness to holiness, highlighting the natural spiritual movement from faith to love. Faith and love provide us with the power to stand fast. These in turn lead to another apostolic goal for every Christian disciple: holiness and sanctity (Jn 17:17).

Saint John the Theologian and the Apostle Peter both emphasize that holiness is the standard by which we judge authenticity of faith (see 1 Jn 2:6; 1 Pt 1:15). The Apostle James discusses the need for holiness as a good defense before the judgment seat of the Lord (Jas 1:12). In today’s passage, Saint Paul carefully traces the path by which we progress from faith to love to holiness. Let us learn how to walk this path.

First, Saint Paul reminds the Thessalonians of the joy he receives from their faith (1 Thes 3:9-10). Earlier, he expressed concerns that they might have slipped away from steadfast faith (vs. 5). He knows how easily they could to revert to their pagan past. They are standing fast, however, and so he rejoices (6, 8).

Now, he reveals his longing to visit them again to “perfect what is lacking in your faith” (vs. 10). He knows what every serious Christian soon recognizes: our faith must be planted and then carefully nurtured, for our trust in God may be damaged if we succumb to the encroachments of the non-Christian world.

To prevent spiritual death, there must always be forward movement in faith. We live in a world filled with hedonism, secularism, and humanism. These ideals dominate the media and flood us with enticing invitations to set aside our faith in God.

Note how the apostle prays for the Thessalonians when speaking of their need to continue growing in Christ. He asks the Lord to make them “increase and abound in love to one another and to all” (vs. 12).

Consider the “work of faith . . . in our Lord Jesus Christ” (vs. 3). One may have trust in all sorts of things in life – possessions, projects, and people – but to trust in the Lord Jesus requires a specific kind of faith, with exacting commitments. Faith in our Lord, when fully grown, produces godly love in us for others, whether they are in the Church or in the world, including those who reject the faith and hate us for it.

For this reason, the Apostle Paul tells the disciples in Galatia that “as we have opportunity, let us do good to all” (Gal 6:10). Unless care, respect, kindness, patience, and consideration for the needs of others is manifest in us, our profession of Christ is sorely lacking. How shall we say it? Trust in Christ means loving as He does! Such love leads us to holiness.

Hence, Saint Paul says, “may the Lord make you increase . . . in love . . . so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness” (1 Thes 3:12-13). Faith and love are gifts from God, as is sanctity. Each virtue requires our active cooperation with God if we are to move toward holiness. God’s grace must be coupled with our own efforts.

Saint Paul prays that God will give His gifts of faith, love, and holiness to the Thessalonians – indeed, he is praying for us even now as he stands before the throne of the Giver of grace. Let us labor at every virtue and place all our trust in God. We are to “owe no one anything except to love one another” (Rom 13:8), for then genuine holiness will flourish among us all.

Teach us to love, O Lord, even as Thou dost love us in purity and in holiness.

November 11 - Wednesday of the Twenty-fourth Week after Pentecost
1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

Apostolic Goals, continued – Purity: 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12, especially vs. 7: “For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness.” Christ our Lord helps us move from faith to holiness, and from there to genuine love. But before such ultimate love can be attained, holiness must take root in us in order to purify our hearts, souls, and bodies.

We are aided in this work of purification by the Holy Spirit. As we engage in the life and worship of the Church, we commit ourselves to live in a way pleasing to God. In the today’s passage, the Apostle Paul addresses purity directly and encourages abstinence and the shunning of all immorality (vs. 3-4). He directs us to struggle against lust (vs. 5) by illuminating the damage wreaked on us by the lifestyles of others in our social communities (vss. 6-8).

The early Christians faced an indulgent pagan milieu very similar to what Church members faces in many societies today. The Greco-Roman world embraced every sort of carnal vice and gross sexual practice, even in its public religious rites. The Jews, who were called to be set part by God, naturally recoiled against the debauchery commonplace in the majority culture.

In the Wisdom of Solomon, we read how “the invention of idols was the beginning of fornication, and . . . the corruption of life. . . . For they either hold child-murdering rites of initiation, or celebrate secret mysteries, or engage in the frantic revelry of special customs.

“Moreover, they keep neither life nor marriages pure, but one either kills another in ambush, or one causes another grief when he corrupts his marriage. Everything is mixed together: Blood and murder, theft and treachery, depravity, unfaithfulness, tumult, perjury, confusion over what is good . . . corruption of family, breakup of marriages, disorder, adultery, and debauchery” (Wis 14:12, 21, 23-26).

The apostles carried on the godly attitudes taught in the Old Testament and by Christ our God. Naturally, they opposed vice. Of course they knew that the strictures of the Mosaic Law did not provide salvation, yet they did not reject the morality of the Old Covenant. They understood the Law as a clear explication of the will of God.

However, they now set out to fashion a new, “holy nation, [God’s] own special people . . . once . . . not a people but . . . now the people of God” (1 Pt 2:9-10). They call the faithful to the will of God for sanctification “that [they] should abstain from sexual immorality” (1 Thes 4:3). This attitude is assumed by Saint Paul and central in his teaching.

Most helpfully, the apostle focuses on our restraint of vice from its source in the passions and lusts. We Christians are to possess ourselves in sanctification, “not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God” (vs. 5).

How does one control “his own vessel in sanctification and honor” (vs. 4) so as to attain purity of heart and soul? We must watch over our inner life, for as Christ says, “whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Mt 5:28). The key to living in purity is to maintain inner purity.

The worst aspect of immorality, as passage from Wisdom of Solomon reveals, is the destruction of trust, fidelity, and loyalty. Corruption destroys honest interaction among people (1 Thes 4:6-7). Adultery defrauds the spouse of the offender, even as debauchery affronts God, destroys trust in communities, and prevents true communion in Christ. The immoral sinner rejects “God, who has given us His Holy Spirit” (vs. 8), the Helper who assists everyone who wishes to attain purity, please God, and truly love his neighbor.

Thou, O God, dost unite us in purity and holiness; keep us in Thy ways all of our days. –
Orthodox Marriage Service

November 12 - Thursday of Twenty-fourth Week after Pentecost
1 Thessalonians 5:1-8

Apostolic Goals, continued – Sobriety: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-8, especially vs. 6: “*Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober.*” Just as Saint Paul calls us to live in purity, he also calls us to be watchful, for those “who are of the day” should live soberly (vs. 8). In modern times, any talk of sobriety raises the specter of substance abuse, for this widespread health issue affects marriages, destroys productivity and health, and corrupts every aspect of one’s physical, social, and spiritual life.

No doubt addiction and drunkenness were as prevalent in first-century Greco-Roman society as they are today. Yet the Apostle Paul does not focus primarily on this issue per se, but assigns a broader meaning to the term sobriety. He stresses our need to be conscious of our ultimate accountability before God. Christian sobriety thus embraces not only the specific problem of substance abuse, but also irresponsibility, loss of direction, and hopelessness.

The present passage begins with instruction about “the day of the Lord” (vs. 2). This phrase refers to the end times: the conclusion of mortal existence and history upon the Lord Jesus’ return. Thus Saint Paul’s call for sobriety is accompanied by a warning of the final judgment, while drunkenness is mentioned only in passing (vs. 7).

In fact, the apostle points toward what we may rightly call “eschatological sobriety,” from the word *eschaton* (“last”). “For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night” (vs. 2). With these words he reframes our brief lives and sets them in an end-time perspective. Sobriety, then, is our antidote to the casual, moment-to-moment indulgence that will strip our life of eternal meaning if we are not careful.

The contemporary world treats values, morals, and personal worth as relative. We are invited to think like the godless man who “says to himself, ‘Who sees me? Darkness encircles me. The walls of my house hide me, and no one sees me. Why should I be afraid? The Most High will not remember my sins.’

“His fear is the eyes of men. Yet he does not know that the eyes of the Lord are ten thousand times brighter than the sun and look upon all the ways of men, and observe even the secret places” (Sir 23:18-19).

Today, many are awed by the sweeping pace of global change and upheaval. They become fascinated with prophecies of the coming end of time. They speculate when the day of the Lord will come, even seeking to predict the very hour. Such activity is contrary to the Lord Jesus’ warning that such calculations are useless (Mt 24:36).

Saint Paul directs us away from idle conjecture and focuses on the end goal of Christian sobriety: to place our energy on growing in the Spirit. Be vigilant against the assault of anyone or anything that distracts from growing closer to the Lord Jesus in heart and soul. “Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober” (vs. 6).

Note how, throughout this passage, the apostle speaks with a confidence born of sure and certain hope. He appeals to us “who are of the day, [to] be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation” (vs. 8).

Consider how a helmet protects the vital area of the head and guards the locus of our senses and the center of our cognitive processing. As Christ’s own, we have a helmet to guard the deep center of the heart, a helmet of hope in our suffering and victorious God and Savior. He has trampled down death and “given unto us life eternal and great mercy.” Let us strive not to falter or stray, but to live soberly, protected by what God wrought for us and in us.

Let Thy mercy be upon us, O Lord, even as we have set our hope on Thee. – Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

November 14 - Saturday of Twenty-fourth Week after Pentecost
2 Corinthians 11:1-6

Being Corrupted: 2 Corinthians 11:1-6, especially vs. 3: *“But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.”* Sectarian voices are often heard over the airwaves and the internet, with each spokesman insisting that he is approved by “the most eminent apostles” (vs. 5). While these “leaders” may seem to preach Christ, they transform the Lord Jesus into “a different gospel which you have not accepted” (vs. 4). Although they often accuse the Orthodox of being outdated and thus “inferior to the most eminent apostles” (vs. 5), we steadfastly follow the apostles appointed by Christ and perennially declare one holy and life-giving gospel.

History demonstrates how easily human “minds may be corrupted” (vs. 3) by cunning half-truths and distortions of the faith. We must remain on guard against every so-called “Christian” teaching that would overshadow the apostolic Church with more “complete” and up-to-date versions the faith. As Orthodox, we are united to the one, true God through holy baptism, having accepted the true faith delivered once and for all to the apostles (Jude 3).

The most dangerous heresies to assault us are those that diminish either the divinity or the humanity of the Lord Jesus, or impugn the reality of His taking on human flesh from the Virgin Mary. God and man are joined eternally and irrevocably in the incarnate Christ. How often the Church reminds us that we worship “a Son without father, who before eternity was begotten of the Father without mother, the property and essence of each substance remaining intact.” Let us carefully attend to the message of the gospels, the icons, and the liturgy!

Our weak natures must learn discernment. If we are unprepared, we are susceptible to false modern ideas. The world does not encourage us to be critical of the spiritual assumptions on which its false teachings are based.

Under the banner of scientific rigor, contemporary wisdom brushes aside the idea of invariable truth and spiritual reality. Or, we may be caught up in the reduction of Orthodox truth by heretical gospels that aim to be more palatable to the so-called modern mind. The apostles knew of such teachings; they coped with Christians who would “not endure sound doctrine . . . because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables” (2 Tim 4:3-4).

We rely on the Holy Spirit to save us from error and “guide [us] into all truth” (Jn 16:13). Immature Christians, whether at Corinth or in one of our own communities, are those drawn toward “a different gospel which you have not accepted” (2 Cor 11:4).

We know and hear only the faith of the apostles during the Divine Liturgy. We ignore invented gospels, which are contrary to the gift of the Spirit in which we are sealed. We “have found the true faith, worshipping the undivided Trinity: for He hath saved us.”

The apostles and the Holy Church are jealous for us “with godly jealousy” (vs. 2). We are “betrothed . . . to one husband . . . as a chaste virgin to Christ” (vs. 2). However, we are only betrothed, for the wedding banquet of the age to come has not begun.

In holy communion, we receive a foretaste of that unending Mystical Supper. Let us confess the Lord like the good thief and not be condemned by accepting false spirits, nor for investigating strange and diminished gospels.

Establish us in Thy sanctification, O Lord, that all the day long we may meditate upon Thy righteousness. – Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom

November 15 - Twenty-fourth Sunday after Pentecost
2 Corinthians 4:6-15

Enlightenment: 2 Corinthians 4:6-15, especially vs. 6: “God who commanded light to shine out of darkness . . . has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” We know Saint Paul’s dramatic conversion occurred while he was an ardent opponent of the faith. He was traveling to Damascus when the Lord Jesus Christ confronted and transformed him amidst a “light . . . brighter than the sun” (Acts 26:13) that “shone around him from heaven” (Acts 9:3). In a moment he was changed from one who “persecuted the Church of God” (1 Cor 15:9) into an ambassador for Christ (see 2 Cor 4:6).

The New Testament indicates that Saint Paul’s experience made him “turn around,” the literal meaning of the Greek words for conversion (*epistrepho* and *metanoeo*). Previously, as Saul of Tarsus, he was obsessed with “threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord” (Acts 9:1). Afterward, the light and glory of the Lord Jesus impelled him to the great task of bearing the Lord’s name before the nations of the earth (Acts 9:15).

In today’s passage, the Apostle Paul presents the three fundamental purposes for which the Lord called him – and all of us – into service: first, to enlighten the world’s peoples with the glory of God in Jesus Christ (vs. 6); second, to manifest the Lord’s life to many (vss. 9-11); and third, to “cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God” (vs. 15).

At creation, God gave birth to light by His Word, saying “Let there be light” (Gn 1:3). Now, in the new creation, He causes His Word, the Lord Jesus Christ, to illumine human hearts, so that we may be united to Christ and His mission. The Apostle Paul declares that it is the same “God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor 4:6).

Steeped in the Hebrew heritage of God’s people, Saint Paul uses the Greek word, *prosopon* (“face” or “person”) to indicate a personal encounter. God the Word places His wonder and majesty within reach of the human race in the person of Jesus Christ. He can be touched and handled (1 Jn 1:1) as a man: someone human beings can receive and recognize.

Humanity’s concept of knowing God has changed entirely. We no longer know *about* Him; now we may *know* Him. In time, the Fathers of the Church would give this concept of *person* “an absoluteness which still moves modern man even though he has fundamentally abandoned their spirit” (Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, p. 35).

God enlightens our hearts within the “earthen vessels” (2 Cor 4:7) of our bodies, so “that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body” (vs. 9). One may press a true Christian, even perplex him, but it is not possible to crush him into despair (vs. 8). When the Romans threatened to kill Saint Polycarp, he prayed: “I bless [Thee] because [Thou] hast considered me worthy of this day and this hour” (Sparks, *Apostolic Fathers*, p. 146).

We see that the Lord is wondrous “in the saints that are in His earth” (Ps 15:2). Christ the Lord is “the light of the world” (Jn 8:12), transforming those united to Him so that they in turn may become “the light of the world” (Mt 5:14).

God’s uncreated light enlightens us so “that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh” (2 Cor 4:11), and His grace “spread through the many [causing] thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God” (vs. 15). When light of God shines through one human being who knows the Lord, it spreads to another, and another. As Christ enables those whom He enlightens to worship, praise, and give thanks, they are renewed – and they in turn renew others.

Illumine our hearts, O Master who loveth mankind, with the pure light of Thy divine knowledge and open the eyes of our minds to Thy gospel teaching. – Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom

November 16 - Monday of the Twenty-fifth Week after Pentecost
2 Thessalonians 1:1-10

Growing Faith: 2 Thessalonians 1:1-10, especially vs. 3: *“We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other. . . .”* We cannot help but admire the early Christians in Thessalonica who showed “patience and faith in all [their] persecutions and tribulations” (vs. 4). Saint Paul gives thanks to God for such disciples, for their faith grew from trust in his preaching (vs. 10) into a robust, mature reliance on Christ (vss. 3-4). We can learn much from them about nurturing our faith!

First, let us acknowledge that faith is God’s gift to us. Faith is a miracle that we trace directly to the Lord Jesus, who is the source of any strong and seasoned reliance on the unfolding will of God. Whenever we yearn for such faith, we turn to Christ our God and ask for patience, trust, reliance, and hope.

First God sends out His apostles and preachers, and they preach the gospel. And, yes, men believe (Rom 10:14). Thanks be to God, even we believe! However, the Apostle Paul tells us, each subsequent step in faith must also come from God.

According to Saint John Chrysostom, “For. . . it is [through] His riches that there are faithful men. . . . ‘And to be marveled at,’ [Saint Paul] says, ‘in all them that believed,’ that is, ‘through them that believed.’ See, he uses ‘in’ for ‘through.’ For through them He is shown to be admirable” (“Homily 3 on 2 Thessalonians, *NPNF First Series*, Vol. 13, p. 385).

The Apostle Paul was sent by God. He preached, and with his own eyes saw men and women believe – surely a miracle from God! How, after we receive the gift of believing in God, do we attain the well-developed, powerful faith that Saint Paul finds in the Thessalonians? According to Saint John Cassian, we beseech God: “So much did the apostles realize that everything which pertains to salvation was bestowed on them by the Lord that they. . . said: ‘Increase our faith’ (Lk 17:5), for they did not presume that its fullness would come from free will but believed that it would be conferred on them by a gift of God” (*Conferences 16, NPNF Second Series*, Vol. 11, p. 327).

But let us be cautious here. God’s gift of faith will not flower without our actively receiving and implementing this gift. We mortal men and women must put our faith to work. We must participate with the Lord through our daily struggles until our faith becomes great. We find indications of this very path scattered through today’s passage.

For instance, when Saint Paul commends the efforts of the Thessalonian congregation, he notes their patience (vs. 4), their endurance (vs. 4), their suffering (vs. 5), and their trust in the apostolic message preached in their midst (vs. 10). These are virtues to which we are all called from day to day.

“And how, you say, can faith increase?” asks Saint John Chrysostom. “It does so when we suffer something horrible for the sake of faith. It is a great thing for faith to be solidly established and not to be carried away by some sophistry. But when the winds assail us, when the rains burst upon us, when a violent storm is raised on every side and the waves follow upon one another, the fact that we are not shaken is a proof that faith grows, grows abundantly and becomes more exalted” (p. 380).

Suffering is our common lot. Let us therefore receive in hope every trial that God permits, trusting Him use this opportunity to enlarge our faith.

Endow us with patience to endure our tribulations that we may rejoice in Thy mercy. – Prayer in Time of Trouble

November 17 - Tuesday of the Twenty-fifth Week after Pentecost
2 Thessalonians 1:10-2:2

God's Good Pleasure: 2 Thessalonians 1:10-2:2, especially vs. 11: *"Therefore we also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith with power."* Saint Paul tells us that the Lord Jesus is coming again to give rest to "those who are troubled" (vs. 1:7), but how will He address the persecutions that His people now suffer? Part of the apostle's answer is that the Lord, in flaming fire, will wreak "vengeance on those who do not know God, and . . . do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" (vs. 8).

To this eye-for-an-eye retribution, Saint Paul adds that the opponents of the faith will also be excluded "from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power" (vs. 9). He then goes on to describe how the Lord will requite those who have believed in Him, and have suffered affliction and harsh treatment for His sake.

"Those who believe" (vs. 10) will receive more than release and rest from afflictions, for God will count His faithful worthy to have "all the good pleasure of His goodness" fulfilled in them (vs. 11). What is this "good pleasure" of God's goodness? Saint Paul states that the Lord Jesus will "be glorified in His saints" (vs. 10), implying that they will be fulfilled by having Christ glorified "in" them.

Yet does Scripture not teach that glory belongs God, as something exclusive to His nature (Ex 15:11)? "Lift up your gates, O ye princes . . . and the King of Glory shall enter in. Who is this King of Glory? The Lord of hosts, He is the King of Glory" (Ps 23:9-10).

Indeed, we read that God's glory exceeds anything man can bear. For example, the great Prophet Moses found grace before God, yet when he asks the Lord to manifest Himself before him, he is told, "'I will pass before you in My glory'. . . . But He said, 'You cannot see My face; for no man can see My face and live. . . . So it shall be, while My glory passes by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock, and will cover you with My hand while I pass by. Then I will take away My hand, and you shall see My back; but My face shall not be seen'" (Ex 33:19, 22-23).

The awesome otherness of God's glory is repeated on Mount Tabor, when the Lord Jesus manifests His divine light to the three disciples "in as much as they could bear it," according to the festal hymn. The icon of the Transfiguration depicts them humbled on the ground by the overpowering radiance of the glory of Christ our God. Even a brief moment of His glory is too much for them.

How, then, will God give glory to His saints? According to Saint Isaac the Syrian, "Just as each man enjoys the physical sun according to the clarity and receptive power of his sight . . . so in the age to come all the righteous shall dwell in one place indivisibly, but each of them is illumined by the one noetic Sun according to his own measure" (*Ascetical Homily 56*).

The Apostle Paul thus declares that the acquisition of *glory* by God's people will be "the work of faith with power" (2 Thes 1:11). The work of the righteous and God's power together can result in "theosis," so that human beings overflow with God's grace and acquire a touch of glory to whatever measure possible.

We find examples of this transforming power of God in the saints even here in this present life, as when Saint Seraphim of Sarov shone with God's glory before his friend Motovilov, becoming radiant. In the age to come, this glory will fill all the faithful in the kingdom by God's power, and He will "be admired among all those who believe" (vs. 10).

O Thou who reignest over the courts of Thy saints, remember us also in Thy kingdom! – Orthodox Funeral Service

November 18 - Wednesday of the Twenty-fifth Week after Pentecost
2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

Deception: 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12, especially vss. 3-4: *“Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple, showing himself that he is God.”* Two thousand years have passed since our Lord Jesus Christ walked among us in the flesh. This passage from Second Thessalonians has often been used to trouble the souls of the faithful (vs. 2) and mislead them with a host of deceptions (vs. 3) and delusions (vs. 11).

Such frauds usually are promoted by demagogues who will not accept the “foolishness of God” (1 Cor 1:25), but favor “the wisdom of this world” (vs. 20) instead. They spread ideas and schemes devised in their own deceived minds. Saint Paul warns us against such deception. We must always be attentive to protect the pure gospel truth that all may be saved (2 Thes 2:10).

Saint Paul begins by alerting us to some of the means used to deceive: “by spirit or by word or by letter” purported to have apostolic source and authority (vs. 2); through “power, signs, and lying wonders” (vs. 9); and through bald, outright unrighteous deception (vs. 10).

Fraudulent teachers usually advance their agenda by claiming private inspiration from the Holy Spirit, or use words that purportedly have the authority of Christ or the apostles. Working from the vortex of pride and ambition, purveyors of the “latest thinking” and “new truths” quote selectively from Holy Scripture or the Fathers to support their teachings. Some use an attractive personality, along with false signs and wonders, to captivate the faithful and lead them away from the gospel and holy tradition.

Of foremost importance, the apostle directs our attention in this passage to the underlying causes that motivate such deceived and deceiving innovators. As a prelude, he observes that deception is preceded by “falling away” (vs. 3) from the basics of the faith. This term “falling away” (*apostasia* in Greek) means denying those basic truths of Christianity without which it cannot be understood.

Behind this “mystery of lawlessness” (vs. 7), however, lies a deeper, more sinister rebellion that seems to well up from nowhere. The Apostle Paul, however, firmly identifies the source of all apostasy as “the working of Satan” (vs. 9). God permits the devil, our fellow men, and even ourselves to make wrong and evil choices (vs. 11).

Let us not be shocked at this divine permission, for He extends freedom of choice to us all (Gn 2:16-17). We must choose to exercise our hearts and minds to embrace His truth, rather than seeking “pleasure in unrighteousness” (2 Thes 2:12).

Let us strive to be aware of the diabolical machinations at work whenever we feel lured from the faith. According to Saint Seraphim of Sarov, “We must always be attentive to the assaults of the devil; for can we hope that he will leave us without temptation, when he did not leave alone our Founder and Source of faith and Perfecter, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself?” (*Little Russian Philokalia*, Vol. 1, p. 57).

Having helped us to see the nature of deception, the apostle spells out what happens when we allow ourselves to be taken in by Satan: our minds are shaken, our lives troubled, and disorder reigns in our communities (vs. 2). Our embrace of lies ends in our condemnation by God (vs. 12), and finally we will perish (vs. 10) along with Satan, when the Lord Jesus returns to destroy him “with the breath of His mouth” and “the brightness of His coming” (vs. 8).

O Lord, save Thy people and bless Thine inheritance, granting to Thy people victory over all their enemies; and by the power of Thy Cross preserving Thy kingdom. – Hymn for the Exaltation of the Cross

November 19 – Thursday of the Twenty-fifth Week after Pentecost
2 Thessalonians 2:13-3:5

Consider the Gospel: 2 Thessalonians 2:13-3:5, especially vss. 14: *“God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.”* A fruitful way to approach today’s epistle is through the word “gospel” (vs. 14). The Greek word *evangelion* can be translated “good news” or “glad tidings.” Thus, the gospel is a kind of message, but one which can only be understood in context, as Saint Paul uses the word in this passage.

He qualifies this message in two ways. First, he refers to it as *our* gospel (vs. 14). Second, if we follow his logic through the verses, he reaches the conclusion that we must obey and carry out the gospel as he and the other apostles have delivered it: “We have confidence in the Lord concerning you, both that you do and will do the things we command you” (vs. 4).

The next consideration is what sort of command Saint Paul is issuing in relation to the gospel. He adds the modifying pronoun “our” to the word “gospel,” giving it a double reference. He speaks as one of the apostles, sent by the Lord Jesus Christ to deliver the message, but he also speaks to us, as the Lord’s disciples.

Note that the message is not Saint Paul’s property, nor does it belong to the apostles. They do not speak for themselves, but for Christ (Mt 28:19-20). The word *apostolos* means “one sent with a message.” This usage is consistent throughout the New Testament. The gospel is a proclamation of an official message from Christ our Lord, by God the Father (1 Thes 2:16). It is delivered by the appointed apostles as an urgent proclamation from God on High.

Let us consider God’s aim in making this proclamation. There are two phrases that capture the Lord’s purpose: “God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth” (vs. 13), and “for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ” (vs. 14).

God’s aim is to save the faithful, who are defined by the sharing in and obtaining the glory manifest in Christ our God. This divine aim is carried out by the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, as we put our trust in what God proclaims and work with Him. Our cooperation with the Holy Spirit is essential, for Saint Paul emphasizes that we must “stand fast and hold the traditions which [we] were taught, whether by word or [his] epistle” (vs. 15). He even offers a prayer in verses 16-17 to encourage us. A good prayer to use!

The concluding verses speak to the immediate circumstances faced by Saint Paul and his fellow apostles, as well as the evils besetting the Thessalonian congregation. This is why Saint Paul urges them to have confidence, and to stand fast in the faith.

The proclamation of God that the Apostle Paul outlines here has immense significance. We are the beloved of the Lord (vs. 13, 16). We are like a bride in relation to her bridegroom, for God from the beginning *chose* us for salvation (vs. 13).

Eternal significance is added to our lives as a result of being selected by God for salvation (vs. 13). Life beyond the grave is assured us, as we confessed at baptism and as we were anointed with the gift of the Holy Spirit. We can hope to obtain the glory that Christ revealed by His radiant appearances after the Resurrection (vs. 14).

The point that Saint Paul would have us grasp is this: we are to stand fast, hold onto the traditions (vs. 15), and pray along with him. Then God will “comfort [our] hearts and establish [us] in every good word and work” (vs. 17). May God make His love known to us and give us true patience (vs. 5)!

O Merciful God, grant us Thy grace, life, peace, health, salvation, and visitation always. –
Baptismal Liturgy

November 20 - Friday of the Twenty-fifth Week after Pentecost
2 Thessalonians 3:6-18

Disorderly Brethren: 2 Thessalonians 3:6-18, especially vss. 14-15: *“And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.”* In dealing with disobedience, the Apostle Paul declares that when the Lord Jesus returns from heaven, He will “give you who are troubled rest . . . taking vengeance on those who do not know God [nor] obey the gospel” (vss. 1:7-8). Some infer from these words that the Lord will come again soon.

Two thousand years after the apostle’s time, the Lord has not yet returned. Still, what Saint Paul conveys is certain: Jesus *will* return. Thus our life in Christ is marked by urgency, because our Lord’s return remains imminent. However, we are at peace, for we know what the Lord teaches: we cannot know the times and dates, but we can prepare ourselves (Acts 1:7).

More immediately, all of us face the certainty of death – a reality that draws closer to us daily. Urgency and readiness are pertinent, even if we tend to neglect them, for at death “the righteous [final] judgment of God” (2 Thes 1:5), our eternal destiny, will be settled (Heb 9:27).

Some in Thessalonica apparently drew wrong conclusions concerning the Lord Jesus’ return, assuming that there was no point in working to support themselves because life would soon end. With no income to buy food, such people were eating others’ bread and burdening the community (2 Thes 3:8). Furthermore, with nothing to occupy their time, they were busying themselves in other’s affairs (vs. 11).

The congregation sought Saint Paul’s counsel for coping with these burdensome and disruptive people. His counsel remains timely, for in every generation there are Christians who abuse the goodwill of their communities. We may profit from the apostle’s answers to these issues when we encounter disruptive people, in our personal life or our congregation. Who does not know profligate and burdensome brethren?

Saint Paul clearly teaches us to “withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition” (vs. 6). There are good reasons for not keeping company (vs. 14) with those who take advantage of others. First, the more time and energy we invest in those who are out of control, the more such persons are encouraged to act inappropriately (vs. 14).

Second, we may discover suddenly that we have become part of the problem, for our efforts to help the unruly may actually fuel their confusion. It is easy to fall into the trap of helpfulness, only to discover that we have exacerbated the problem by interfering. Third, frustration builds up when we persist in trying to change an unchangeable situation. The likelihood of our being drawn into quarreling or abuse increases.

Detachment is our best course: to remain quiet and apply wholesome energy to our own concerns (vss. 7,12). The apostle states a dictum, now become proverbial, for dealing with those who will not apply themselves in life: “If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat” (vs. 10).

The application of this pronouncement must be grounded in love: to bring offenders to repentance (vs. 14). Saint Paul encourages us to admonish erring members as we would a brother, with loving concern. Confrontations devoid of love are counterproductive. Thus we pray to the Lord for the grace to admonish constructively, and to be prayerful in such matters.

While we encourage the freeloader and the overly dependent to be accountable to the Lord, we never neglect those who are truly in need and require our help. Classifying brethren in any sense verges on judgment, and that is God’s prerogative. Let us never “grow weary in doing good” (vs. 13)!

O Lord, lead us to do Thy will and become worthy of a place at Thy right hand. – Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

November 22 – Twenty-fifth Sunday after Pentecost
Ephesians 2:14-22

Jews and Gentiles: *Ephesians 2:14-22, especially vss. 17-18:* “*And [Christ Jesus] came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.*” Our faith teaches that the reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles is achieved in Christ Jesus, “the chief cornerstone” of new Israel, the Church (vs. 20). The apostle in this epistle refers to the Jews as “the Circumcision” and to all other ethnic peoples as “Gentiles in the flesh,” or “the Uncircumcision” (vs. 2:11).

If we examine the implications of Saint Paul’s remarks, we understand that although most Orthodox Christians today are Gentiles, they still belong to the “commonwealth of Israel” (vs. 12). They are united to Christ, the true Messiah of Israel. Therefore, we Gentiles are citizens of the New Jerusalem, the Zion of God.

Elsewhere, Saint Paul explains that Christians of Jewish heritage also are part of the true Israel of God. Even the “natural branches” may one day choose to “be grafted into their own olive tree” once again (Rom 11:24).

In “An Orthodox Christian Priest of Jewish Heritage Serving in Jerusalem,” we read the story of Father Alexander Winogradsky, who does “not consider [himself] ethnically a Jew or Hebrew.” He quotes Saint Paul’s verses in Ephesians to affirm the idea that Christ “created in Himself one new man from the two” (cf Eph 4:15) (*Again*, Summer 2005, Vol. 27.2, pp. 18-19).

Saint John Chrysostom understands these verses in similar fashion. He points out that Saint Paul does not “disparage the Israelitish prerogative,” but rather enhances it. However, Saint John adds that the greatest risk for any Jew or Gentile, according to Saint Paul, is “being without Christ . . . being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel.”

Therefore no one should take comfort on the basis of ethnicity alone, because “this circumcision is not the commonwealth,” for “the Israelites themselves were without this commonwealth, not however as aliens, but as indifferent to it, and they fell from the covenants, not however as strangers, but as unworthy.” Likewise, those of Gentile heritage were people “having no hope . . . and without God” until the coming of Christ Jesus. What they worshiped were not gods, for an idol is nothing (1 Cor 10:19).

We must understand that Saint Paul speaks here as a Jewish Christian to the Ephesians, a community of Gentile Christians. His point is that Christ the Lord “Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation” (Eph 2:14). Ethnic distinctions no longer exist in Him, for we are all one in Christ.

Again, according to Saint John Chrysostom, “It is not that the Gentile is become a Jew, but that both the one and the other are entered into another condition. . . . Laying hold on the one hand of the Jew, and on the other of the Gentile, and Himself being in the midst, He blended them together, make all the estrangement which existed between them to disappear, and fashioned them anew from above by fire and by water” (“Homily 5 on Ephesians,” *NPNF First Series*, Vol. 13, p. 71-72).

Whether Jew or Gentile, what separated the human race from sharing in the true Israel of God was our enmity toward our Creator. This enmity arose from our sin, which manifest itself as opposition to the commandments or the law. Now, Christ Jesus has reconciled us all as “God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity” (vs. 16). In Christ the cornerstone, we are now “being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit” (vs. 22).

O Lord, King of ages and Creator of all, who didst accept crucifixion and burial in the body to deliver us all from hades, Thou art our God, and beside Thee we know no other. – Orthros Hymn of Praise

November 23 – Monday of the Twenty-sixth Week after Pentecost
1 Timothy 1:1-7

A Pure Heart and Sincere Faith: 1 Timothy 1:1-7, especially vs. 5: “Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith. . . .” Saint Paul directs his disciple Timothy to command those at Ephesus to “teach no other doctrine . . . than godly edification which is in faith” (vss. 3-4). Fables, genealogies, and disputes are contrary to edification. The apostle’s commandment is given so that we may know true love: God’s love, which alone renews and refreshes our souls.

Specifically, Saint Paul calls us to labor for “a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith” (vs. 5), for these alone secure us in the renewing and refreshing love of Christ. A *pure heart* commands and directs the soul, dispelling any evil thoughts that enter it, so that we do not receive “[our] soul in vain” (Ps 23:4). Such a heart will draw close to God, and the Lord will dwell within us to help our heart continue in purity (Jas 4:8).

“Notice that God does not tolerate the slightest impurity,” observes Saint John of Kronstadt, “and that peace and God Himself leave you immediately after the admittance of any impure thought into your heart. And you become the abode of the devil if you do not immediately renounce the sin” (*My Life in Christ*, p. 301).

We are easily corrupted by contact with the evil spirits around us, for the “skirmish line” of spiritual warfare is within our mind. Evil thoughts must be stopped there if we hope to attain the pure heart that knows Christ.

“Once we have in some measure acquired the habit of self-control, and have learned how to shun visible sins, brought about through the five senses, we will then be able to guard the heart with Jesus, to receive His illumination within it, and by means of the intellect [i.e., the nous] to taste His goodness” (*Philokalia* vol. 3, p. 18).

We are sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit, who is the invincible ally of our five senses in destroying the dark enemies – if we are willing to seek His aid. Our *good conscience* is also the ally of the pure heart, but the conscience must first be purified also. Mercifully, God gave us a guardian angel at baptism who warns the conscience.

We must heed our guardian angel’s warnings and observe our thoughts and actions. Only then will we learn to grieve before the Lord. “Do not be surprised that you fall every day; do not give up, but stand your ground courageously. And assuredly the angel who guards you will honor your patience” (Saint John Climacus, *Ladder of Divine Ascent* 5.30, p. 64).

A lively conscience guards our love for God and others. On the other hand, a deadened conscience is like a switched off alarm that fails to sound at mortal danger. “We must carefully consider whether our conscience has ceased to accuse us, not as a result of purity, but because it is immersed in evil,” says Saint John Climacus. “Many from long neglect become incurable, but with God all things are possible” (p. 65).

Thus we come to *sincere faith*, the third essential of true love. Purifying the heart requires our trust in God, which explains why Saint Paul yokes faith with “a good conscience” (vs. 5). According to Saint Herman of Alaska, “Faith and love of Christ make a true Christian. Our sins in no way hinder our Christianity, as we can tell from the words of the Savior Himself. He stated that He had ‘not been called to judge the righteous, but to save the sinful - there is more joy in Heaven at one sinner who repents than at ninety-nine righteous men’” (Mt 9:13; Lk 15:7) (Oleksa, *Alaskan Missionary Spirituality*, pp. 44-45).

O Lord, heal my soul, enlighten the eyes of my heart, grant peace to my spiritual powers, that with faith unashamed I may love and obey Thee to the attainment of Thy kingdom. – Post-communion Prayer

November 24 – Tuesday of the Twenty-sixth Week after Pentecost
1 Timothy 1:8-14

Everything in Christ: 1 Timothy 1:8-14, especially vs. 12: *“And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry. . . .”* The “faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3) continues to exist in the Church as it has from apostolic times. This faith is illumined for us by the Holy Spirit so long as we remain “in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life” (Jude 21).

The so-called pastoral epistles (two addressed to Timothy, one to Titus) offer an early record of how the faith “delivered to the saints” is handed on to subsequent leaders. Aging and death, or the need to transfer leaders into new ministries, means that the Church’s pastors must find way to entrust the saving truths of the faith to new hands. Hence, in First Timothy, the Apostle Paul writes to his young protegee, addressing him as “a true son in the faith” (1 Tim 1:2).

To Timothy, his “true son,” the apostle offers a message applicable to all, leaders and laypeople alike. If we are to find the strength, grace, and mercy of God, we must draw upon the Lord Jesus (vss. 12-14).

In the present passage, we observe how Saint Paul uses his own life as an example of what Christ accomplishes when He places His call upon those who serve Him. He empowers each of us for discipleship – but especially those whom He appoints to lead the ministries of the Church, whether locally, regionally, or worldwide.

First, Saint Paul focuses on the Law of God, summarized in the Ten Commandments (vs. 8). Next, he reviews the condition of the hearts and souls of the godless, for whom the first four commandments are given. These individuals disdain any relationship with God. Saint Paul characterizes them as lawless, insubordinate, God-denying, and profane (vs 9).

Such people serve fabricated idols, rather than the true God. They worship created things and invest energy in their gods of wealth, pleasure, power, status, and the like. They disdain the law, which they do not consider sacred, and the guidance of their superiors. Instead, they favor whatever pleases and satisfies their own desires.

The apostle next lists the sins forbidden by the last six commandments. These mandates concern our relationships with one another. As the apostle lists these sins (vss. 9-10), he follows the same order found in Scripture (see Ex 20:12-17).

His review of these fundamentals of the Law establishes a background and foundation for his review of the sound doctrine of “the glorious gospel of the blessed God which was committed to [his] trust” (1 Tim 1:11). To this topic he now turns his attention.

With the phrase “committed to my trust” (vs. 11), the apostle sets the stage for addressing how God’s grace transformed him from a persecutor of the Church into an apostle. He profoundly thanks the Lord for granting him mercy, as He does with any sinner who repents.

Saint Paul sets his former life as a “blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man” before us to serve as an example (vs 13). Here he refers to his early life when he was “breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord” and bringing men and women “bound to Jerusalem” for prosecution, trial, imprisonment, and death (Acts 9:1-2).

The Apostle concludes with the assertion that “the grace of our Lord [is] exceedingly abundant with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus” (1 Tim 1:14). In other words, there is no sin God will not forgive. If we continue striving to live in Christ, He is faithful to us.

O Lord, help me to sin no more and always do that which is pleasing unto Thee.

November 25 - Great Martyr Katherine of Alexandria
Galatians 3:23-4:5

Great Women Martyrs: Galatians 3:23-4:5, especially vs 28, *“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”* Saint John Chrysostom expands this teaching of the Apostle Paul concerning the place of women as equals within the Church. He reminds us to offer the prayer “Memory Eternal” for the “Many women [who] have suffered martyrdom. She is able to practice chastity even more than men, no such strong flame disturbing her, and to show forth modesty and gravity and ‘holiness, without which no one shall see the Lord’ (Heb 12:14), and contempt of wealth, if she will, and in short all other virtues.” Countless women have witnessed unto blood for Christ. During the commemorative *Litia* (a word referring to Prayers of Supplication), the Church specifically names among “the holy, glorious, great women martyrs, Thekla, Barbara, Anastasia, Katherine, Kyriaki, Photeini, Marina, Paraskeva and Irene,” and including many who remain unnamed!

The virtues and strengths of the great women martyrs are well defined in the present reading; exemplifying what Saint Paul describes as being justified by faith (vs 24), sons of God, that is, unqualified heirs of the His kingdom (vss 26,29), in Christ (vs 27), and redeemed from bondage to the spiritual powers of the world (vs 1). Thus, they call us to share in the life in Christ, and by their prayers they will aid us in attaining His heavenly kingdom.

The great Martyr Katherine of Alexandria shows herself wholly “justified by faith” (vs 24), for being “Set aflame with divine longing for Christ,” she “didst despise the torments” of the Emperor Maxentius in his paganism. He thought to defeat her wisdom before His court philosophers; but she defeated them in reasoning, leading them to faith in Christ. In fury, the Emperor had his philosophers burned. Katherine’s courage before Maxentius so moved his Empress, that she came to the martyr and found life in Christ. Maxentius then tortured and slew his wife, and, when further tortures failed to prevail over Katherine’s faith, he had her beheaded.

The great Martyr Barbara chose the kingdom of God above the riches of natural family, being a “child of God” (vs 26). She repudiated all the suitors offered by her godless father. Then, she was “slain and offered unto God as a sacrifice” at her own father’s hands.

When we are “baptized into Christ [and] have put on Christ” (vs 27), we are redeemed (vs 1) from every bondage by which persons and institutions in this world seek to enslave us to their ways or desires. But when we know that we are free in spirit through Christ, we gain His unconquerable detachment from whatever would enslave us. The Great-Martyr Anastasia was the daughter of a pagan senator in the city of Rome. However, her mother, Fausta, was a Christian, who had her instructed by the wise tutor Chrysogonos, from whom she learned the freedom that is ours in Christ. Legally married, she avoided her husband’s advances, outlived him, and spent his wealth in bringing relief to Christians undergoing imprisonment and torture. She traveled widely over the Empire, supporting the faithful everywhere until finally, under Diocletian’s Governor in Illyricum, she was burned alive, freely giving her soul to Christ.

The hosts of the great women martyrs “by divers torments and fire and stripes showed forth and depicted the saving and august Passion of Christ....Being set aflame with the fire of the love of the Lord God, they fully disdained the fire...and thus...wholly burned up the dead wood of error’s insolence...and, in that they poured forth their blood in streams through their endurance and great patience, they watered all the Church, which then blossomed forth with faith.” Let us learn from them that we may become “heirs according to the promise” (vs. 29).

O Great Martyrs, pray that we may attain to the lot which we were given through mercy.

November 26 – Thursday of the Twenty-sixth Week after Pentecost
1 Timothy 3:1-13

Selecting Clergy: 1 Timothy 3:1-13, especially vs. 10: *“But let these . . . first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless.”* Here is godly counsel from the Apostle Paul on the need to identify, appoint, and train competent leadership for the Church. He continues to explore a major concern of his in this letter: how we are to transmit the faith to succeeding generations. His first concern is that without blameless, competent, and mature clergy, any effort to pass on the faith will falter, leaving the Church weak and ineffective.

We present-day Orthodox Christians reading this first-century letter will discover some differences between contemporary practices and those of the early Church. For instance, bishops at that time appear to have been drawn from the ranks of married men (vs. 2) with children (vs. 4). What is important to remember is that the clergy of the early Church, very much like our clergy today, were men with common weaknesses and strengths, even though their social and marital circumstances differed.

The unfolding of the Church’s ministry over the centuries has a certain analogy to the development of a living organism. For instance, many seeds will sprout and push up through the soil, first appearing as simple two-leaf plants that look much different when they grow into maturity. Similarly, the earliest historical records concerning the clergy reveal that the ordained ministry took a somewhat different shape than do the holy orders as we know them in the Church today.

As the ministry grew and developed within the Church, taking slightly different forms over its long development, the clergy through time nevertheless remain organically related within the Body of Christ. As Saint Paul instructs, the Church has always required men who are morally pure, personally mature, and who enjoy a good testimony in all of their relationships. Such words describe our God-pleasing clergy, both past and present.

We note in particular the emphasis of the apostle on worthy moral character. He asserts that the clergy must be blameless (vss. 2, 10), of good behavior (vs. 2), not given to wine (vss. 3, 8) nor violent or greedy (vss. 3, 8), nor quarrelsome or covetous (vs. 3), nor filled with pride (vs. 6), nor double-tongued, i.e., deceptive (vs. 8). Rather, they should hold “the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience” (vs. 9).

Certainly, everyone is aware of how much mischief befalls a community because of clergy who give themselves over to immorality. We thank God that the great majority of our ordained priests are men who lead pure, moral, and faithful lives.

The Apostle Paul admonishes Timothy to be very careful that both bishops and deacons are mature men. He mentions that they must be “the husband of one wife,” meaning neither polygamous nor divorced (vss. 2, 12). They must be sober-minded (vs. 2), temperate (vs. 2), and gentle (vs. 3).

Novices in the faith are not ordained (vs. 6), for the observation of candidates over time helps the Church identify their capacity for “blamelessness” (vs. 10). The pressures of pastoral life are such that clergy must be balanced and settled as persons, which is why our hierarchs today take care to assure that they have gained good general education, seminary training, and other testing in life before ordination.

Finally, the Apostle Paul urges that all clergy have “a good testimony among those who are outside” (vs. 7). They must be able to rule their own household as well (vss. 4, 12). Here again are two arenas where criticism will weaken a priest’s witness. Pray for our pastors!

O Master, Christ, may Thy Holy Spirit ever guide the Church in choosing and ordaining men worthy to stand before Thy Throne, to edify Thy people, and to feed the flock of Thy pasture.

November 27 - Friday of the Twenty-sixth Week after Pentecost
1 Timothy 4:4-8

Good Doctrine: 1 Timothy 4:4-8, especially vs. 6: *“If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed.”* In today’s passage the Apostle Paul begins and concludes with an important topic: he is most concerned that Timothy should instruct the faithful in good doctrine (vs. 6). As we follow his thought in this passage, we note that he not only directs Timothy to teach the brethren good doctrine, but also commands him to follow, continue, and practice what he teaches.

According to Bishop Kallistos Ware, “It is not enough simply to give intellectual assent to a system of doctrine, for tradition is far more than a set of abstract propositions – it is a life, a personal encounter with Christ in the Holy Spirit. Tradition is not only kept by the Church – it lives in the Church, it is the life of the Holy Spirit in the Church” (*The Orthodox Church*, p. 206).

Those who teach prove themselves to be good ministers of the Lord when they are themselves “nourished in the words of faith” with which they “instruct the brethren” (vs. 6). If he is pass on his faith in the Lord, a teach must transmit doctrine to others both by instruction and by example – a manifestation of his own struggle for knowledge, faith, and salvation.

Consider the apostle’s phrase “nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine” (vs. 6). How do words of teaching and doctrine “nourish?” How does doctrine feed us?

When the Lord came to the Samaritan city of Sychar (Jn 4:4-43), He and the disciples stopped near Jacob’s well. While the disciples go “away into the city to buy food” (vs. 8), an extensive conversation takes place between the Lord and a woman who has come to draw water. As the discussion is ending, the disciples return with food.

The disciples urge the Lord, “Rabbi, eat” (vs. 31). He replies, “I have food to eat of which you do not know” (vs. 32). They are puzzled, and so the Lord Jesus explains, “My food is to do the will of Him Who sent Me, and to finish His work” (vs. 34). Teaching and doctrine are what nourish the Lord.

Something in us hungers for a kind of food that no bread in this world can ever satisfy, for “man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Mt 4:4). The words of God and His holy doctrine are the “bread of the kingdom” that we receive (Lk 14:15) – although often we are able to take only the milk of doctrine, not its strong meat (1 Cor 3:2).

Still, our spirits hunger and thirst for the word of God and for good teaching. “Blessed are these who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled” (Mt 5:6). Only those who are nourished on sound doctrine can in turn transmit the faith.

When we, as God’s people, are nurtured on good doctrine, we are better able to follow what we have received and to *exercise* ourselves toward godliness (vs. 7). In the original Greek, the word for exercise is *gymnaze*, the root of our word gymnasium, or place of exercise. Truly our faith disciplines, trains, and exercises our spirits!

As our hearts grow in godliness through the practice and exercise of good doctrine, we grow and mature. We gain faith not only for this life, but also for “that which is to come” (vs. 8). Let us be like good athletes, refusing that which offers little profit: the profane, the false, and the trivial (vs. 7). We continue, rather, in holy tradition, which saves us and all who hear (vs. 16). This is the Orthodox faith, known and worthy of passing on.

Feed us, O Lord, with Thy pure words that we may increase in stature, unto ripe old age. –
Chrismation Prayer

November 28 – Saturday of the Twenty-sixth Week after Pentecost
Galatians 3:8-12

Faith and Works: Galatians 3:8-12, especially vs. 9: “So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham.” In the West, the influences of scholasticism, the Reformation, and the ensuing Counter-Reformation have led to sharp divides among Christians over the role of faith and works in salvation. The battle cry of the Reformers was “sola fidei” (by faith alone). Roman Catholic leaders upheld their Church’s traditional high regard for good works, perhaps sometimes at the expense of faith.

Often, the text of Galatians is cited by the Reform side in these battles, while the epistle of James is used to uphold the importance of good works. The Orthodox Church, which remained apart from this controversy as a result of geography, culture, and a mindset that affirms the synergy of faith and works, has always rejected the false opposition of the two doctrines.

In today’s reading from Galatians, the Apostle Paul distinguishes between “those who are of faith” (vs. 9) and those who “are of the works of the law” (vs. 10). The passage provides a starting point for examining the Orthodox understanding of the mutuality of faith and works.

The Orthodox perspective is that both works and faith are essential in the economy of God. Thus, an Orthodox reading of today’s passage sees Saint Paul describing issues that were contested – and settled – during the apostolic age.

Both Saint Paul and the opponents to whom he refers accept Christ as the Messiah. However, those who are “of the works of the law” (vs. 10) oppose the apostle’s reception of the Gentiles as converts. They believe it necessary to require these converts to adopt the panoply of rituals set down in the Judaic law, including circumcision, dietary restrictions, ritual washings, and the observance of the seasons and days of fasting and celebration.

Saint Paul repudiates these demands for cultic conformity to Mosaic practice. In his rejection, he represents the common position of all the apostles (see Acts 15). His orientation to salvation, which is based on the work of the Holy Spirit, replaces rigid conformity with the outward rituals of Judaism with the living way of the Lord Jesus.

To bolster his argument, the apostle presents Abraham as a model for our salvation through the preaching of the gospel. He asserts that we are saved by the living truth to which God calls us. Indeed, Saint Paul tells us, Abraham already had the gospel revealed to him – centuries before the Mosaic Law gave circumcision as the sign of God’s covenant (vs. 8).

We observe how Saint Paul calls the patriarch “believing Abraham” (vs. 9). God blessed Abraham for believing in Him – even though he lived long before Christ, who won the salvation of our human race by His death and resurrection.

Thus when non-Jews – the so-called Gentiles – believe in Christ Jesus, they become “those who are of faith” (vs. 9). They are divinely blessed with Abraham. They are saved without keeping the ritual practices of Moses, just as Abraham was saved.

What about the other ethical requirements of the Law? In Saint Paul’s view, these existed before Moses, who merely codified them. Men already knew such requirements in their hearts (Rom 2:14-15).

Further, the Lord Jesus admonishes His followers not to break “one of the least of these commandments” (Mt 5:19), but to do those works through faith *in Him*. Those who have faith in Christ fulfill the commandments in joyful thanksgiving.

O Christ our God, fulfillment of the Law, fill our hearts with joy and gladness always.

November 29 - Twenty-sixth Sunday after Pentecost
Ephesians 5:8-19

Walk as Children of the Light: *Ephesians 5:8-19, especially vs. 16:* “*See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.*” In 1943, after his army swept ashore and occupied the Vichy-French colony of Morocco, General George S. Patton issued an order to his troops using a classic rhetorical device: make a situational declaration and followed by a series of commands. Patton declared, “Each one of you is a representative of a great and victorious army.” Then came his orders: “Stand up, keep your clothes buttoned, your chin straps fastened. Salute your officers.”

In today’s passage, the Apostle Paul uses this time-tested method with us. He makes his basic declaration: “You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord” (vs. 8). Then he follows it with a string of commands to us as disciples, with the key at the beginning: “Walk as children of the light.” Every subsequent command in Saint Paul’s list is extension of his first order, and requires our action.

As we read this passage, bear in mind that the declarations and subsequent commands are paired, with each positive connected with a parallel negative. “You were once darkness” but “now you are light” (vs. 8); “have no fellowship,” “but rather expose them” (vs. 11); “walk . . . not as fools but as wise” (vs. 15).

Each command reflects the nature of being Christ’s disciple, a “light in the Lord” (vs. 8). Let us bear this core truth in mind as we consider the four pairs of commands that the apostle intends for us to take to heart and obey.

The first command is “have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them” (vs. 11). Free choice is implied in this imperative. Each of us chooses with whom we wish to have *koinonia* (“fellowship,” “communion”). We may opt out of idolatry and immorality, exposing false worship and self-indulgence for what they are. Light exposes darkness as “the cup of demons” as Saint Paul tells the Corinthians (1 Cor 10:21).

The Apostle’s next command is to “walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise” (Eph 5:15). In Scripture, the fool is one who says, “There is no God” (Ps 13:1). In Christ we are children of the light (Eph 5:8) who have wakened from sleep: we receive the light of wisdom from the Lord (vs. 14) despite the evil days of this age (vs. 16).

To avoid unwise choices, we need to make every effort to “understand what the will of the Lord is” (vs. 17), Saint Paul’s next directive. His order moves us to attend Divine Liturgy regularly, to receive the holy mysteries, keep a prayer rule, and read Holy Scripture. We plead with God to “come and dwell in us and cleanse us of every stain” and to “illumine our hearts . . . with the pure light of Thy divine knowledge.” There are many false choices, but only one true Way to God and divine blessing.

Finally, the apostle orders us not to “be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but to be filled with the Spirit” (vs. 18). The pagan worship of the first century was often little more than orgies. Saint Paul offers the sacred alternative of “psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” (vs. 19). The nature of the Church’s worship is to provide opportunities for “singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord” (vs. 19).

How then do we “walk as children of light” (vs. 8)? We are to avoid evil company, heed the Church’s teaching, seek God’s will through regular devotion, and practice moderation in our daily living. After all, we are “light in the Lord” (vs. 8).

Fulfill now, O Lord, the desires and petitions of Thy servants as may be most expedient for us, granting us in this world the knowledge of Thy truth, and in the age to come, life eternal.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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