

A COLLECTION OF HOMILIES

BY FR. CHARLES
OF JESUS AND MARY

Homilies

A Collection of Homilies by Fr. Charles of Jesus and Mary

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Fellowship with Christ Revealed in Love for Others

A strong relationship with Christ cannot be hidden. It manifests itself in how we treat those around us. The Lord said, “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). Love for Christ is not an isolated, internal affair. It flows outward. A man who claims closeness to Christ yet carries grudges, resentment, or indifference towards others is self-deceived. The Apostle John writes without ambiguity, “Those who say, ‘I love God,’ and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars” (1 John 4:20). It is impossible to love the Head while scorning His Body.

When our hearts are joined to Christ in prayer, in the keeping of His commandments, and in humility, the grace of the Holy Spirit teaches us to see our neighbour not as a hindrance to our spiritual life, but as a necessary part of it. We begin to see in every person a soul created in the image of God, wounded by sin as we are, and in need of the same mercy we have received. The closer one draws to Christ, the more clearly one

sees others not through the lens of pride, but with the eyes of compassion. Our Saviour did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life for all. He bore the weaknesses of others, and so must we. “Bear one another’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2). The life in Christ is not a solitary ascent into the clouds, but a descent into service, humility, and communion with others.

There is no genuine union with Christ without a genuine care for His brethren. The one who communes with Christ in the chalice but ignores his brother in need is not abiding in the light but in darkness. The Lord made it clear when He said: “Whatever you did to one of the least of these... you did to me” (Matthew 25:40). The measure of our love for Christ is the measure of our love for those He loves—especially the poor, the sick, the lonely, and the sinful. As Christ took on our burdens, so must we take on the burdens of others, not out of compulsion but out of love. This is not an optional spiritual discipline but the very heart of Christian life. We are not saved alone, and we will not be judged alone. We are judged by how we treat those around us.

The Christian life is not a private escape to heaven, but a shared pilgrimage. We journey not as individuals competing for holiness, but as fellow labourers and fellow sufferers. Our sanctity is tested in the daily grind of patience, forgiveness, and charity. Our progress is not measured by how high we soar in contemplation, but by how low we are willing to stoop in service. When a brother falls, we do not trample him with pious rebukes, but lift him with the same mercy Christ showed us. If we cannot walk in charity with our brother, we are not walking with Christ. Any spirituality that isolates us from others or inflates us with pride is not of God. The road to the Kingdom is wide enough only for those who carry each other.

A great many fall into delusion because they measure their spiritual life by unstable emotions, dramatic experiences, or withdrawal from others, while neglecting the Gospel's plain and unchanging command: "love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:12). True spirituality does not consist in feelings, visions, or the number of hours spent in seclusion, but in obedience to Christ and love for His flock. The

devil does not care how long you pray, so long as your heart remains cold. He will allow tears in solitude, so long as you refuse to forgive. He does not tremble at visions; he trembles at repentance and mercy. The desert fathers were clear in their warnings. Saint Anthony the Great said that the time would come when the insane would rise up against the sane and declare them mad, because they did not resemble the madness of the world. That madness includes false spiritualism — pride cloaked in piety, self-will disguised as holiness. Saint John Climacus, whose *Ladder of Divine Ascent* remains unmatched in clarity, taught that the true measure of one's love for God is not ecstasies in prayer, but enduring one's neighbour without anger or contempt. If you cannot bear the faults of others, your heart is not yet grounded in Christ. Patience with the brethren is harder than any fast.

If our faith does not lead us to peace, mercy, and honesty with others, it is not the faith of the Apostles. It is a delusion. It is easy to construct a false Christ within the mind—one who makes no demands and requires no charity. But the real Christ demands the crucifixion of the old man,

which includes our pride, our grudges, and our hypocrisy. The Holy Mysteries—Baptism, Confession, the Eucharist—do not nurture pride or animosity. They confront and burn them out like fire. If a man approaches the chalice with hatred in his heart, he defiles the very Body and Blood he claims to honour. As Saint Paul warns the Corinthians, “All who eat and drink without discerning the body, eat and drink judgement against themselves” (1 Corinthians 11:29). This is not a symbolic statement. It is a warning grounded in spiritual reality. One cannot claim to partake of Christ while refusing to live in His likeness. The Eucharist is not a talisman. It is a judgement upon the soul—either unto salvation or unto condemnation. If a man comes with humility and a forgiving heart, he is healed. But if he comes while nurturing bitterness, slander, or division, he partakes unworthily. His lips touch grace, but his soul remains in darkness. This is the great danger of a spiritual life divorced from love.

Christ did not teach us to seek Him as individuals detached from His Church, for He Himself established the Church as His Body, not a collection of isolated souls. He did not leave

behind a book or a private set of meditations, but a visible, living community united by faith, sacraments, and obedience. “Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them” (Matthew 18:20). This verse is often misused to justify private religion, but its context is ecclesiastical—it speaks of binding and loosing, of brotherhood, of accountability, and of communal prayer. Christ is found in the midst of His people, not outside them.

To be in communion with Christ is to be in communion with His saints—both those triumphant and those still struggling. There is no such thing as Christ without His Church. The Church is not an optional support group for the religious; it is the ark of salvation, the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit, and the household of faith. To claim union with Christ while remaining indifferent or hostile to His people is to believe in a fantasy. “The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you’” (1 Corinthians 12:21). We are joined to Christ by baptism, confession, communion, and the life of love within His body. No one climbs to Christ over the backs of others. We ascend together, or not at all. Love of God

without love of neighbour is counterfeit. It is a lie, plain and simple. Saint John says, “The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also” (1 John 4:21). Not should. Must. There is no bypass around the Cross to reach the Resurrection. If you want to stand with Christ, you must stand with His Church. If you want to be forgiven, you must forgive. If you want mercy, you must be merciful. Forgiveness and charity are not high-level ascetical achievements; they are the ground floor of Christian life. Without them, everything else is fraud.

A strong relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ will always express itself in charity, forgiveness, and unity with others. These are the fruits that prove the tree is alive. Saint Paul describes the fruit of the Spirit as “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Galatians 5:22–23). These are not decorations; they are signs of real life in God. This is not optional. It is the visible mark of belonging to Christ. If you lack these things, your relationship with Christ is either sick or non-existent. Do not be deceived. Do not chase

feelings and mystical thrills. Seek Christ where He has promised to be—in His Body, in His commandments, and in the love of your neighbour. There and only there will you find Him.

St. Thomas—A Witness of the Wounds

The Sunday of Apostle Thomas, known in Russian as Antipascha (“opposite Pascha” or “after Pascha”), is the first Sunday following the Feast of the Resurrection. It commemorates the Apostle Thomas’s encounter with the risen Christ eight days after the Resurrection, as recorded in John 20:24–29. This event is central not only to the post-Resurrection appearances of Christ but also to the Church’s proclamation of the reality of His bodily resurrection. Among the Orthodox Old Believers, this feast carries a particular depth of meaning, bound to our emphasis on continuity, physicality, and uncompromising faithfulness to the traditions handed down from the pre-Nikonian Church.

The key passage is from the Gospel according to John: “Then he said to Thomas, ‘Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.’ Thomas answered him, ‘My Lord and my God!’” (John 20:27–28)

Thomas is often unjustly called “Doubting

Thomas,” as if he were some sort of sceptic or unbeliever. This label is both misleading and unfair. Thomas was not doubting the possibility of Christ’s resurrection in a rationalistic or modern sense; he was demanding to see the marks of the nails and the wound in Christ’s side because he knew what had happened at Golgotha. He had seen the crucifixion with his own eyes. He had seen the Lord’s body broken, His side pierced, His blood and water poured out. He wanted to be certain that the one appearing to the other disciples was not a vision, not a ghost, and not a deception of grief or the imagination. He was not content with second-hand reports, even from the other Apostles. He wanted personal knowledge. His words—“Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe” (John 20:25)—were not words of defiance, but of rigorous integrity. He would not proclaim the Resurrection unless he was certain that it was the crucified Lord Himself who had risen.

Christ, in His condescension and patience, does not scold Thomas. He appears again, this time for Thomas. “Peace be with you,” He says, and then

He invites Thomas to touch His wounds: “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe” (v. 27). He does not humiliate him. He meets his need. He offers His risen body for inspection. There is no dismissal, no belittling. He gives Thomas what he asked for, because faith in the Resurrection must be grounded in the reality of the Cross. The risen Christ still bears His wounds. The wounds are not erased; they are glorified. They are marks of identity, not shame. Thomas responds with the clearest and most theologically rich confession in the Gospels: “My Lord and my God!” (v. 28). He does not call Him teacher, or Rabbi, or Messiah. He calls Him Kyrios and Theos—Lord and God. This is not doubt. This is certainty. And it comes from contact with the wounded, risen flesh of the Saviour.

Christ’s next words—“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe” (v. 29)—are not a reproach to Thomas. They are a beatitude for us. Thomas was not excluded from Christ’s blessing; he was the occasion for it. The Lord is not rebuking Thomas but strengthening

the faith of those who will follow. The Apostles saw, touched, and heard. But the generations to come will believe without seeing, without touching. They will believe the apostolic word. They will trust the Gospel. And Christ calls them blessed. This includes all who have held fast through persecution, exile, and loss—such as the Old Believers, who, though they saw the collapse of the canonical order in Russia, remained steadfast in faith passed down by those who had seen.

Thomas is not the patron of doubters. He is the witness of the wounds. He reminds the Church that faith must be in the crucified and risen Christ, not an abstract idea or a moral teacher. He demands to see the marks of death, and in seeing them, confesses the Resurrection. His insistence is not unbelief; it is fidelity. And our Lord, in His mercy, answers it—not with a lecture, but with His body.

Liturgical Observance

The Sunday of St. Thomas is celebrated with full Paschal joy. The hymns of the Octoechos, still

chanted in the Old Rite according to pre-Nikonian rubrics, carry over the Paschal tone, and the greeting Christ is risen! (Christos voskrese!) continues to be used. The Divine Liturgy retains much of the Paschal character, affirming that the Resurrection is not a one-day event but a forty-day celebration culminating in the Ascension.

In the pre-Nikonian Typikon, Antipascha marks the first day when the faithful return to normal prostrations during prayer. However, the Paschal joy is not diminished. The fact that the Church appoints the reading of Thomas's confession—"My Lord and my God!"—for this Sunday demonstrates that this declaration is the very heart of the Christian proclamation.

Old Believer Perspective

The Old Believers, who rejected the unlawful and foreign-imposed liturgical reforms of Patriarch Nikon in the mid-17th century, have preserved an unbroken continuity with the Russian Orthodox tradition as it stood before the apostasy of the synodal hierarchy. For us, the Sunday of Apostle Thomas is not just a calendar event but a spiritual

touchstone—a confirmation of our witness to the truth, even when we are slandered, exiled, and burned for it.

Firstly, our strong emphasis on the integrity of the body and the preservation of the physical forms of worship corresponds directly with the Gospel message of the physical resurrection. The Incarnation was not symbolic. The Resurrection was not an allegory. They were real in the most tangible sense. The Word became flesh, not idea. He rose in the same body in which He was crucified, with the wounds yet visible. This truth strikes at the heart of modern spiritualist errors which reduce Christ to a figure of inward experience and liturgy to a theatre of preferences. Thomas's demand to touch the Risen Christ was not irreverence, nor stubbornness, but a desire for holy certainty—a certainty grounded in the real and visible body of the Lord. It is this same desire that led the Old Believers to resist any and all innovations in ritual, texts, and sacred traditions, no matter how subtle or how loudly their proponents appealed to Greek precedent or imperial pressure. The Resurrection is a reality that touches flesh and bone. And so must our

worship. If the faith is embodied, then so too must be its expressions—gestures, words, icons, chant, and books, preserved without alteration, because they were received as sacred. Just as the Apostles could not reimagine the risen Christ in a different form, so we cannot tolerate the revision of rites once hallowed by centuries of use and sealed by the blood of martyrs. The Old Rite, in all its visible forms, is a proclamation of the Resurrection, because it confesses that Christ came in the flesh and rose in the flesh. To mutilate the inherited rites is to mutilate the witness of the Resurrection itself.

Secondly, the very act of holding fast to ancestral rites mirrors Thomas's clinging to the visible and tactile reality of Christ. Thomas would not rest content with a report, however reliable. He sought to see and to touch. Likewise, the Old Believers have not accepted reforms handed down by imperial fiat or synodal decrees backed by bayonets. We remain bound to the Church of our Fathers—not to a church restructured by modernising bureaucrats in cassocks. Every gesture, every syllable of the old chants, every prostration and every use of two fingers to sign

the Cross, is our confession of fidelity to the Christ who showed His wounds to Thomas.

When we chant “Alleluia” twice instead of three times, as we always did before Nikon’s betrayal, we are not arguing over numbers. We are defending the unaltered voice of the Church. When we resist the addition of the third “Alleluia,” we are resisting the notion that sacred things may be tampered with because of political convenience or foreign fashion. When we cling to the old liturgical books, handwritten and preserved through the centuries, we are not nostalgic; we are obedient. For “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8). To us, that is not poetry. It is theology. It is fact. The modernist urge to change sacred things on the basis of scholarly consensus or foreign usage is, for us, not an intellectual exercise, but a spiritual betrayal. It is akin to denying the reality of Christ’s wounds, to claiming that His risen body could be adjusted, streamlined, or reinterpreted for a new generation. It is no coincidence that those who altered the rites also opened the door to secularism, rationalism, and eventually atheism in Holy Russia. It began with

changing “Alleluia.” It ended with Lenin. Such is the fruit of innovation.

We who are called Old Believers do not take that name in pride but in faithfulness. We do not invent. We do not adapt. We receive and we preserve. Like St. Thomas, we place our fingers in the nail-prints of the inherited tradition, and we confess, with full voice and unwavering heart: “My Lord and my God!”

Martyrdom and Confession

Thomas’s exclamation, “My Lord and my God!”, is a confession—a solemn proclamation of faith in the risen Christ, who stands before him bearing the marks of crucifixion. This confession comes not from theory or argument, but from direct encounter. It is the confession that every Christian is called to make—not once, but constantly, through word, action, and above all, through endurance in the face of suffering. In the tradition of the Church, the term confessor has a precise meaning. It refers to one who has suffered for the faith, who has endured persecution, torture, exile, or imprisonment for the sake of

Christ, but who has not died a martyr's death. The confessor is one who has borne witness under duress and has remained unshaken. In this sense, the Old Believers of the 17th and 18th centuries are confessors. They were hunted like criminals, imprisoned, mutilated, tortured, and burned alive by the Russian state and by the reformed Church hierarchy under the influence of Nikon and the imperial court. Their only "crime" was faithfulness—faithfulness to the rite, the prayer, the gesture, and the language sanctified by centuries of use in the Russian Orthodox Church before it was forcibly aligned with foreign models and altered by decree.

They would not cross themselves with three fingers, because their fathers had crossed themselves with two. They would not bow to liturgical books corrected by Protestant scholars in Greek, because their inherited books were sanctified by the blood of the saints. They would not accept a council summoned by the Tsar and dominated by Latinising influences. And so they were mocked, labelled schismatics, exiled to the wilderness, and murdered without mercy. Whole villages were burned. Monasteries were

destroyed. Women and children were locked inside wooden churches and set alight by government troops. But they did not recant. Like St. Thomas, they held fast to the incarnate reality of their faith. Their confession was not grounded in emotional fervour or intellectual protest, but in holy certainty—a certainty that the faith handed down by the Fathers was not to be “updated,” “reformed,” or “improved.” It was to be kept. What they preserved was not a cultural relic, but the lived memory of the Body of Christ. And so must we.

Our churches are adorned with icons painted in the traditional Russian manner—ascetic, severe, luminous with the light of the Kingdom, not corrupted by the sentimental and theatrical style imported from the West after the reforms. These icons are not art; they are dogma in colour, theology in line and form. They reveal the spiritual world, not the emotions of the painter. They do not flatter the eye; they elevate the soul.

Our chant is *znamenny*, a solemn and unadorned mode of prayer, structured to lead the heart upward without distraction. It is not polyphonic,

not Italianate, not romanticised. It is the voice of the Church as she prayed before Peter the Great began remaking her in the image of Western courts and theatres. Znamenny chant is slow, deliberate, and sober—like the true Orthodox faith. It does not seek to entertain. It exists only to glorify God.

Our confession, then, is not a museum of customs frozen in time. It is the continuation of the Apostle Thomas' exclamation. When we hold to the Old Rite, we are not being archaic. We are being faithful. Each gesture, each prostration, each psalm chanted in the old tone, is a repetition of "My Lord and my God!" Each refusal to compromise with modern liturgical innovations is a defence of the same truth Thomas saw with his eyes and touched with his hands—that Christ is risen in the flesh, that the wounds are real, and that the faith does not change.

The Old Believers were called stubborn. But they were steadfast. They were called heretics. But they were confessors. In their simplicity and endurance, they were closer to Thomas than the reformers who persecuted them. And if we would

stand with Thomas, then we must continue standing with them—not in name only, but in rite, in life, and in witness.

The Resurrection and the Church

The Sunday of Apostle Thomas affirms that the Church is founded not on speculation, nor on private revelations, but on the testimony of those who saw the Risen Lord with their own eyes. “This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses.” (Acts 2:32) The Apostles did not preach dreams. They preached what they had seen and handled. “We have seen the Lord,” they said to Thomas (John 20:25), and later, they would say the same to the nations. This apostolic witness is the rock upon which the Church stands, and it cannot be replaced by opinion, modern theory, or changing cultural sentiment. But the Sunday of Apostle Thomas also contains within it a word to us, who have not seen. The Lord says, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.” This is not a lower form of faith, nor a consolation prize. It is a commendation of the faithful across the generations, who, without visions or miracles,

have clung to the tradition with unwavering fidelity. In our tradition, especially among the Old Believers, this is understood as a high calling. We do not walk by sight, nor are we sustained by signs. We do not see the wounds, yet we believe. We do not hear the Apostles' voices, yet we preserve their prayers word for word. We have not touched the risen body of Christ, yet we confess His Resurrection with boldness. To preserve the faith intact, unchanged, and handed down without adulteration is itself an act of faith. It is to believe as Thomas believed—without seeing, but with certainty.

This is why the Sunday of Apostle Thomas holds a special place in the pominki—the memorial gatherings of the faithful for the departed. On the Monday following, which we call Radonitsa—the “Day of Rejoicing”—the Church turns to the graves of the faithful with the proclamation of the Resurrection. In many villages, processions go to the cemeteries. Graves are cleaned. Paschal foods are shared. Psalms are read. And above all, the Paschal greeting resounds over the tombs—Christ is risen!— This is a theological statement, a declaration of dogma. We proclaim the

Resurrection where the world sees only decay. We confess life where others see only bones. Among the Old Believers, this day takes on even deeper meaning. So many of our martyrs and confessors were buried in secret, or in mass graves, or in the wilderness where they fled from persecution. But we do not forget them. Their bones are not forgotten. The Resurrection of the body is not a metaphor for us. We do not speak of “resurrection” as a symbol of spiritual renewal or moral improvement. We speak of real bones, real flesh, real glorified humanity rising from the grave, as Christ rose. “Your dead shall live, their corpses shall rise. O dwellers in the dust, awake and sing for joy!” (Isaiah 26:19) We say these words with full belief that these bodies will be raised.

When we chant “Christ is risen” over the tombs of our forebears, we are not reciting poetry. We are repeating what the Apostles preached. We are joining Thomas in his confession—not in a room behind locked doors, but standing among the graves, proclaiming to death itself that it has been conquered. As we bow before the crosses marking the resting places of our fathers and

mothers, we are saying with unwavering conviction that death has no dominion, and that this faith, preserved without corruption, is the faith that saves. Thus, the Sunday of Apostle Thomas is for us not only the beginning of the second week of Pascha, but also the opening of the great and final hope—the resurrection of the dead and the life of the age to come. It binds the testimony of the Apostles to the faith of the faithful departed. It confirms that our hope is not buried in the past, nor severed by time, but alive, because Christ is risen indeed.

Conclusion

The Sunday of Apostle Thomas reminds the Church that doubt can lead to the clearest confession when it is honest. The Old Believers embody this confession—not in words alone, but in lives sacrificed for fidelity to the Risen Lord. Like Thomas, they refused to accept a second-hand gospel or a man-made ritual. Today, as did our forbears, we demand to see and touch what was handed down from the Apostles and the Fathers. And if we find it threatened, we will give up everything to preserve it.

Christ showed His wounds to Thomas not because He had to, but because He honours the seeking heart. The Old Believers of the past, for all their severity, have continued this sacred seeking. They are not antiquarians; they are witnesses. We continue this today without compromise! As it is written:

“Do not doubt but believe.” And our answer, like Thomas’s, is clear: “My Lord and my God!”

True Faith and Salvation

In this homily I want to offer a bold and uncompromising reflection on a particular statement made by St. Arseny Uralsky, a hierarch of the Old Believers' tradition, whose teaching stands in stark contrast to the diluted religiosity of the modern age. Citing the words of the Lord from John 3:36 and Mark 16:16, St. Arseny proclaims that salvation is inseparably tied to true faith in Christ and baptism into the life of the Church. His words reject the ecumenical pretences and relativistic theologies which dominate contemporary discourse, affirming instead the apostolic truth — that outside of Christ there is no life, and that rejection of Him is not a harmless difference of opinion but a path to condemnation. True faith liberates man from death—not in metaphor or sentiment, but in reality. We will examine how this liberation is ecclesial and sacramental, grounded in the Mystery of Baptism and the obedience of faith within the ancient Apostolic Church. I hope it will help expose the false assurances of modern spirituality, the errors of sentimental universalism, and the betrayal of apostolic

doctrine by those who water down the Gospel to suit modern appetites.

At the same time, this homily is meant to defend the clarity and finality of St. Arseny's words as an act of mercy — a call to repentance, to faith, and to life. It is a summons to return to the voice of the Fathers, the confession of the martyrs, and the doctrine of Christ without compromise. For only in the true faith, received and preserved within the Apostolic Church, do we find deliverance from death and hope of the Kingdom.

St. Arseny Uralsky wrote:

“Through true faith in Christ, we are liberated from death and hope to attain eternal life and the heavenly kingdom, as He said: ‘He who believes in Me (the Son of God) shall have everlasting life, but he who does not believe in the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him’ (John 3:36). And again: ‘He who believes and is baptized will be saved, but he who does not believe will be condemned’ (Mark 16:16).”
(Justification of the Old Believer Church)

St. Arseny speaks with the unflinching clarity that once characterised the confessors of Orthodoxy in the days before the compromise of Holy Russia. His words are not tempered by the cautious ambiguities of modern theological jargon. He speaks of true faith in Christ not as a polite assent to doctrinal concepts or an abstract philosophical agreement, but as a living, burning submission to the Only-Begotten Son of God—a submission that costs a man his pride, his independence, and his worldly affections. The saint does not seek to please ecumenical ears. He affirms that the rejection of faith in the Son is not a light misstep but a condemnation, an exposure to the very wrath of God. These are the words of the Scriptures, unvarnished and stern, yet true. John 3:36 and Mark 16:16 are straightforward declarations. They separate those who are in Christ from those who are outside His mercy, and this division is not erased by sentimentality, universalism, globalist agendas or the shallow assurances of modern religion.

St. Arseny connects true faith to liberation from death. This is certainly not some symbolic freedom or metaphorical gesture. He means

actual release from the dominion of death—because death is not natural to man. Death entered through sin, and sin reigns where Christ does not. (Romans 5:12; 1 Corinthians 15:21-22) The saint is speaking of ontological liberation: a real, spiritual transfiguration that occurs when a man no longer lives for this world but for the age to come, when he unites himself to Christ through faith and baptism and obedience. However, this is not individualistic optimism, as found in the spiritual self-help books of the West. This is ecclesial. It presumes the Church, the Mysteries, the Orthodox life. When St. Arseny speaks of believing and being baptised, he does not mean the mere pouring of water or reciting of words. He means being buried with Christ in the sacramental life of the Apostolic Church. Baptism is entry into Christ's death. Faith is its crown, not its replacement.

The second half of this quote is also vital. "He who does not believe will be condemned." This is not a threat issued to frighten unbelievers. It is a solemn declaration that the path outside Christ leads to condemnation because outside of Him there is no life. The wrath of God is not like

human anger, shifting and impulsive. It is the settled opposition of divine holiness to all that is impure, rebellious, and corrupt. God is love, but He is also holy. And He will not compromise His justice to accommodate those who despise His Son.

The modern world, including much of modernist Catholicism, emotionalist Protestantism, and contemporary Orthodoxy, recoils at this message. It prefers inclusive vagueness and flattering silence. But the saints did not speak this way. St. Arseny speaks the truth because he knows what it means to fear God and love Him. To preach Christ crucified is to draw a line — the line of salvation. And that line is drawn in the blood of the Lamb.

As Christians, we can not leave room for the neutral man, the good atheist, or the vaguely spiritual. Apostolic teachings does not appeal to those who “mean well” or follow their own path. There is one faith, one baptism, one Church, and one Lord. Outside of Him, there is no life. Therefore, some may find St. Arseny’s words to be “harsh”, but they are merciful. They are the

mercy of warning, the mercy of truth. He does not soothe the conscience of the apostate or lull the indifferent into comfort. He speaks so that they may repent, believe, be baptised, and be saved.

And in doing so, he bears witness not only to the Gospel of Christ, but to the faith of the Fathers, unchanged and undiluted. This is the voice we must recover. Not the voice of compromise, but the voice of the Church in the wilderness, the Church in the desert. The voice that calls the dead to life through the faith of the martyrs and the waters of regeneration. Let us not be ashamed to speak as St. Arseny spoke. For our salvation depends on it.

To conclude this article, I want to say that St. Arseny is not offering a theological suggestion. He delivers a command of Christ, echoing the voice of the Apostles and the Fathers who preached not for acceptance, but for the salvation of souls. His words, drawn directly from the Gospel, cannot be diluted without doing violence to the message of Christ Himself. "He who believes and is baptized will be saved, but he who does not believe will be condemned." (Mark 16:16) This is the dividing line. Not academic speculation, but divine

revelation. Not the product of theological councils seeking common ground, but the Word of God made flesh and preached unto all nations. In an era that is obsessed with theological relativism, where many priests, bishops, and even entire synods prefer ambiguity over clarity and diplomacy over fidelity, St. Arseny's voice is a sharp rebuke. He exposes the liberal modernists within Christendom—those who speak endlessly of dialogue and inclusion, while abandoning the apostolic faith handed down once for all (Jude 1:3). These are the same who preach Christ without His cross, salvation without repentance, and ecclesiology without the Church. Their sermons are light shows, their theology therapeutic. They do not call men to die with Christ, but to feel better about themselves while dying in their sins.

St. Arseny speaks as the prophets spoke—without apology and without compromise. He does not seek to “reimagine” Christianity for a new generation. He does not tone down the Gospel to make it more accessible to the secular man. He simply proclaims the truth — that salvation comes only through true faith in Christ, lived and

expressed in baptism, obedience, and the sacramental life of the Church. He does not flatter the heretic, nor affirm the unbeliever in his delusion. He does not sentimentalise God's justice, nor hide the reality of divine wrath. He teaches as the Fathers taught, in continuity with the saints, with the martyrs, with the Apostles. He is a confessor of truth in an age of betrayal.

Let this be a warning and an exhortation. The modernist theologians, the ecumenical diplomats, and the liberal clergy may wear the garments of the Church, but their doctrine betrays her. They preach a different Christ—one who saves without repentance, who welcomes all paths, and who requires nothing but a vague sense of goodness. This is not the Gospel. This is not the Apostolic faith. It is a lie that leads souls to destruction. We must not tolerate their corruption. We must not participate in their conferences, endorse their documents, or imitate their empty rhetoric. We must return to the fear of God, the simplicity of the Gospel, and the ascetic struggle of our Fathers. Let the words of St. Arseny awaken us. Let them silence the false teachers and stir the hearts of the faithful. Let us teach our children,

baptise our households, and stand firm in the confession of the ancient Church, even if the world and Christendom's own hierarchy mock us.

In the end, we will not be judged by synodal resolutions, ecumenical declarations, or popular consensus. We will be judged by the words of Christ: "He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." (John 3:36) May we, like St. Arseny, never compromise, never retreat, and never be ashamed of this Gospel. For it is not ours to amend. It is God's to proclaim—and ours to obey.

The Real Presence of God

In an age of noise, distraction, and spiritual confusion, many have forgotten the reality of God's presence. They chase after visions, feelings, and signs, thinking that God must be summoned or provoked to appear. But the living God is not like the idols of the nations. He does not hide behind curtains of emotion or spectacle. He is not silent because He is absent, but because He is near—too near for those who have dulled their hearts with the world. The Apostolic Church, faithful to ancient teaching and the witness of the saints, confesses that God is always present. He upholds all things by His Word. He sees, knows, and acts in every moment. To forget this is not just ignorance—it is outright rebellion. To remember it is the beginning of wisdom, the root of repentance, and the path to life. What follows is not speculation or opinion. It is the testimony of the Bible, the teaching of the Fathers, and the lived experience of the Church throughout the ages.

The presence of God is not confined to sacred buildings or extraordinary visions. Our Scriptures

teach us that the Lord is not distant from His creation. In Psalm 139:7–10, King David wrote: “Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.” These are not poetic exaggerations. They are declarations of the all-encompassing reality of God’s being. He is not restrained by space or time, nor is His presence subject to human invocation or ritual. Whether in the heights of joy or the depths of suffering, He is there. In the battlefield and the monastery, in the market and the grave, He is not absent. To relegate God’s presence to a church building, or to suppose it appears only in rare spiritual ecstasies, is a form of idolatry. It is to make God into something manageable and predictable. But the God of Israel is not like the idols of the nations. He is the living God Yahweh, who appeared to Moses in a bush that burned and was not consumed (Exodus 3:2). He fills all things. This is why the Holy Church begins her prayers with the invocation: “O Heavenly King, the Comforter, the Spirit of truth, who art everywhere present and fillest all things...” Not some things—all things. If we believed this with the seriousness it demands, we

would not live as though God were watching us from the edge of the world. We would tremble before His nearness.

God's presence is not dependent on our feelings. Whether we sense Him or not, He is there. A man may walk through the desert and believe he is alone, but if his heart is seeking the Lord, then God is nearer than the air in his lungs. The danger of our age is that we have trained ourselves to ignore Him. Technology, entertainment, and the noise of modernity drown out the stillness in which God is often perceived. But even our ignorance does not diminish His presence. He is still sustaining the world by His will. He is still calling each man and woman to repentance, regardless of whether they listen. This truth should shape the way we live, especially in a world that forgets or denies Him. If God is present in all places and sees all things, then nothing is hidden from His sight. As the Apostle writes, "before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account." (Hebrews 4:13) This is not sentimental comfort; it is reality. It demands vigilance, repentance, and reverence.

We do not wait for the presence of God to arrive. He is already here. The question is whether we have trained our hearts to behold Him, and whether we have cleansed our lives to be fit for His dwelling.

God's presence is most fully revealed to us in the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is the central event of all human history — not that man reached up to God, but that God stooped down to man. As the Apostle John wrote, “And the Word became flesh and lived among us.” (John 1:14) This is not a metaphor. The eternal Logos, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, truly took on flesh—bone, blood, soul, and mind—and was born of the Virgin Mary. He did not appear as a phantom, nor did He simply borrow human form. He became man in the fullest sense, while remaining fully God. The presence of God, once made known in fire and cloud, now walked among us with human feet. He did not remain in glory apart from us but humbled Himself to dwell among sinners. As the Apostle Paul writes, “he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself.” (Philippians 2:7–8) He did not come to a

palace, but to a manger. He did not surround Himself with the righteous, but with tax collectors and harlots. In this humiliation, God revealed not weakness, but the strength of divine love. This was not a passing visit. The Incarnation is not a temporary arrangement. Christ remains forever both God and man. It is the permanent union of the divine and human natures in one Person. By this union, He has forever bound Himself to mankind.

Even after His Ascension, He did not leave us orphaned. He told His disciples, “I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you.” (John 14:18) That promise was fulfilled at Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit descended upon the Apostles in tongues of fire. From that moment, the Church became the dwelling place of God on earth. His presence did not depart, but was deepened. Christ abides in His Church through the Holy Spirit, guiding, sanctifying, and enlivening her. The Church is not an institution of men; it is the Body of Christ, animated by the life of God Himself. To enter the Church is not to join a religious club—it is to enter the life of the Holy Trinity.

The Holy Mysteries of the Church, especially the Divine Liturgy, are not symbolic acts but the real presence of God among His people. When the faithful gather around the Holy Table, Christ is not distant. He is not remembered like a figure from history. He is present—truly and wholly—in the Eucharist. As He said, “This is my body... This is my blood.” (Mark 14:22–24) These are not poetic phrases. They are literal declarations. The bread and wine, once offered, become the very Body and Blood of Christ, not by the work of man, but by the descent of the Holy Spirit. We do not imagine Christ present in the Liturgy. We receive Him. We commune with Him. We become, by grace, what He is by nature. This is the full reality of His presence with us—until the end of the age. Those who deny the real presence of Christ in the Holy Mysteries are not holding to the faith once delivered to the saints. They speak with the voice of heresy, reducing the sacred to symbols and empty rites. Such teachings are not new—they echo the errors of the gnostics and iconoclasts, who could not bear the truth that God became flesh and continues to dwell bodily in His Church. As St. Ignatius of Antioch warned,

“They abstain from the Eucharist and from prayer because they do not confess that the Eucharist is the flesh of our Saviour Jesus Christ.” (Letter to the Smyrnaeans, 7) To reject this is to reject Christ Himself. Let the Church have nothing to do with such men unless they repent.

The presence of God is also made known in our conscience. Conscience is not an invention of philosophy or psychology—it is the echo of God’s voice within the soul of man. As St. Paul writes, “They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, to which their own conscience also bears witness.” (Romans 2:15) This inner voice does not speak in riddles. When a man sins, he knows it not because of societal norms or legal codes, but because he has grieved the living God. Every sin is a personal offence, not an abstract infraction. It is rebellion against the One who fashioned us and breathed life into our dust. When the Prophet Nathan stood before King David and declared, “You are the man!” (2 Samuel 12:7), it was not a prophet’s opinion but God’s judgement. David’s adultery and murder were not hidden, even though he thought he had covered his tracks. God saw. God judged. Yet even in His

rebuke, God did not annihilate David. He offered repentance. This is how God acts toward the sinner. He does not abandon us in our filth, though He has every right to. Instead, He calls us out of it, not with the voice of flattery, but with the authority of a Father. And when we answer, He cleanses. Not lightly, not sentimentally, but thoroughly.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 9:10) because it strips away illusions. It awakens us to His presence in our daily life. It does not mean terror in the way pagans fear capricious gods. It means standing in awe before the majesty and holiness of the One who sees all, judges all, and loves with severity. A man who fears God walks carefully, prays constantly, and repents quickly. He does not presume upon mercy, nor does he trivialise grace. His conscience remains sharp, not dulled by excuses or modern justifications. It is better to feel the sting of guilt than to fall into the sleep of indifference.

Christians must never live as though God were absent. That is the thinking of atheists and

apostates. To live as though God does not see, does not care, or is not near, is a path to delusion and destruction. It is spiritual blindness. It leads to despair, licentiousness, and finally to death—not just of the body, but of the soul. He who walks in the fear of God walks in the light. He confesses, prays, fasts, and prepares himself to stand before the dread judgement seat of Christ. Not with presumption, not with arrogance, but with hope born of obedience.

We do not conjure God's presence through emotion or noise. The modern world, intoxicated with entertainment and theatrical religion, imagines that volume and excitement are signs of divine activity. This is a delusion. God is not a spectacle to be summoned. He is not stirred by drums, lights, smoke machines or the noise of crowds. True piety does not depend on heightened emotion, which passes as quickly as it rises. Emotional manipulation is not prayer. It is a parody of worship. The Holy Church, faithful to the Apostolic tradition, rejects this frenzy. It is not godliness, but confusion. As the Apostle says, "God is a God not of disorder but of peace." (1 Corinthians 14:33) The prophet Elijah learned this

when he stood at Horeb. The wind tore the mountains, the earthquake shook the earth, and fire blazed—but the Lord was in none of them. Then came “a sound of sheer silence.” (1 Kings 19:12) It was there, in the stillness, that God spoke. This was not weakness—it was majesty. God does not compete with chaos. He reveals Himself where man is willing to be silent and to listen. This is why the Christian must cultivate stillness, both inward and outward. Without stillness, prayer is scattered and the soul remains agitated. The Fathers of the Church call this *hesychia*—a holy quiet in which the soul stands attentively before God. However, silence does not mean distance. It is not the silence of abandonment, but the silence of awe before God’s nearness. When the priest lifts the gifts, we do not shout or clap. We fall silent, because the King is present. It is the same silence that filled the disciples when they beheld Christ transfigured. They could not speak, for the glory of God had overtaken them. This silence is not emptiness. It is fullness. It is not loneliness. It is communion. The man who fears God knows that in silence, every breath is an offering and every heartbeat is a witness to the One who dwells within.

The Holy Church preserves this truth in her ascetic life, her reverent prayer, and her Holy Icons. The Church does not follow the fashions of the world, nor does she adapt her worship to please modern appetites. She keeps the silence of the desert fathers, the discipline of the saints, and the unchanging reverence of the Apostolic Tradition. Her prayers are not entertainment, but sacrifice. Her icons are not decorations, but windows into eternity. Before them, we do not invent God in our image. We behold the Word made flesh, the same yesterday, today, and forever. In a world ruled by noise and distraction, the Church stands as a bastion of stillness, because there—hidden from the world—God is present.

Let every soul be vigilant, for the Lord is near. Let us walk in His presence with fear, obedience, and hope.

Sermon for Holy Pascha – 2025

Christ is Risen! Indeed, He is Risen!

Today, my beloved in Christ, we stand not at the grave of a dead teacher, not before the tomb of a fallen prophet, and not at the end of some moral philosophy. We stand before the empty tomb of the Living God. Death has been conquered, the grave has been shattered, and the ancient tyranny of sin has been undone. The Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ is not an allegory, not a metaphor, not an invention of the weak-minded, but the central and unshakable fact of human history. If Christ is not risen, then all our faith is in vain, and we are the most pitiable of all people. But as the Apostle proclaims, “But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died.” (1 Corinthians 15:20)

Last night, as we stood in the darkened church holding our unlit candles, we were no different from the world before Christ — surrounded by shadows, bound by the silence of the grave, held captive under the yoke of sin and death. And then, the light of the Paschal flame was passed

from hand to hand, and the darkness could not resist it. This is not theatre; this is a revelation of what has been done for us and for the whole world. The tomb has lost its prey. “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.” (Luke 24:5) The angels announced it; the apostles bore witness to it; the martyrs died confessing it; and the Church stands upon it.

Do not be deceived, brethren, by the world which surrounds us — a world steeped in arrogance, a world that mocks the Resurrection as though it were a myth spun from the minds of frightened peasants. The modern world, intoxicated by its technology, seduced by its own machinery, praises its intellect as if the towers of Babel had been rebuilt and completed. It scoffs at the empty tomb, it sneers at the Risen Christ, and it scorns the hope of eternal life. It dresses this scorn in the garments of science, philosophy, and so-called progress. It builds museums and universities and calls them temples, and it fills them not with truth, but with the lies of materialism and human self-worship.

This world glorifies death even while it pretends to fear it. It builds industries around death — it markets abortion as health, it peddles euthanasia as compassion, it celebrates the withering away of the soul in its addiction to wealth, power, and pleasure. And all the while it dresses its corruption in fine words: “liberty,” “choice,” “autonomy,” and “dignity.” But strip away the costumes, and the world stands naked before the grave, a grave which it cannot escape. The world denies the Resurrection not because it has evidence against it, but because it cannot bear the thought that death has lost its dominion. If Christ is risen, then the world must repent, and the world will not repent.

The world fears the Resurrection because it exposes the futility of its idols. If Christ is risen, then Caesar is dethroned. If Christ is risen, then wealth, status, and pleasure stand condemned as the distractions of fools. If Christ is risen, then the fleeting kingdoms of this age are nothing but sandcastles before the tide. The Resurrection does not fit into the world’s narrative of self-importance, self-determination, and self-glorification. And so the world does what it has

always done: it mocks what it cannot understand and slanders what it cannot control. Modern man, drunk on his own pride, imagines that the Resurrection is a fable for children, a relic of the past for the simple-minded. He builds cathedrals of steel and glass and calls them cities. He studies the stars and believes he has mastered the heavens. He probes the atom and believes he has understood the building blocks of life. But when he stands at the side of an open grave, all his theories turn to ash. Death remains, and it will not negotiate with him.

The Resurrection is not dependent on man's belief. Truth is not shaken by the rejection of the arrogant. Christ did not rise because men accepted Him; He rose whether they believed or not. The stone was rolled away, not to let Christ out, but to let the apostles see. The empty tomb stands as the eternal rebuke to the self-assured wisdom of this fallen world. We believe not because it suits our feelings, nor because it gives comfort to the weak, but because the apostles saw Him, touched Him, ate with Him after the Resurrection. St. John writes, "That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you." (1

John 1:3) The apostles did not stake their lives on a myth. They staked them on what their eyes had seen and their hands had handled. Their blood sealed their testimony.

The Resurrection is not a private comfort. It is the turning point of history. It is the triumph of Christ over sin, death, and hell. It is the pledge of your own resurrection, if you remain faithful. The world can mock it, deny it, or ignore it, but its mockery is empty noise. Christ is risen, and the world's laughter will one day fall silent before His judgement Seat.

Let the world cling to its illusions. Let the sons of this age parade their scepticism. Their laughter is short-lived. The Resurrection stands — fixed, unmovable, eternal — the first light of the new creation, the defeat of death, and the unassailable foundation of our faith.

St. Paul writes with iron clarity, cutting through all human excuses and evasions: “For as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ.” (1 Corinthians 15:22) These are not the words of a poet seeking to comfort, nor the musings of a

philosopher lost in speculation. This is a statement of fact — as cold and unyielding as the stone of a tomb. In Adam, all die. Not some. Not most. All. The rebellion of one man dragged down the whole human race. His disobedience to God was not an error, not a slip, but an act of defiance. He chose to turn his face from his Creator and so the world was plunged into the darkness of sin and death. From that hour, death has stalked every man, woman, and child born into this world. Death does not ask permission. Death is not the peaceful passing that modern sentimentalism would have us believe. It is not the quiet companion the world tries to domesticate. It is the great and terrible tyrant. Death is the price of sin. St. Paul declares it without ambiguity: “For the wages of sin is death.” (Romans 6:23) Just as a labourer receives his due wage at the end of the day, so every man receives his due — and the payment is death.

And mark this well: death is not natural. The modern world tries to baptise death, to call it part of the ‘circle of life’ or the ‘natural order.’ This is a lie. Death is an intruder. Death was not part of God’s creation, for when God beheld His works,

He pronounced them “very good.” (Genesis 1:31) Death entered only after man’s rebellion, and it entered not as a process but as a punishment. However, the story does not end with Adam. God, in His mercy and righteousness, did not abandon mankind to the grave. He sent His Son, the Second Adam, Jesus Christ, who took on the same flesh that had fallen and carried it into battle against the very enemy that had enslaved it. Christ did not send an angel to fight death. He did not command death from a distance. He met death face to face, clothed in human nature. He bore our sins and tasted death in our place. And how did He defeat it? Not by divine decree. Not by sheer display of power. He entered into death willingly. He laid down His life freely: “No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.” (John 10:18) He submitted to the grave, but the grave could not hold Him. Death devoured Him, but could not digest Him. The uncorrupted One shattered the bonds of corruption from the inside. He destroyed death not with weapons forged by men, but with His own death.

This is why the Cross, the symbol of Roman

execution and imperial terror, has become the banner of victory for the Church. Christ did not avoid the Cross. He embraced it. He did not retreat from the tomb. He descended into it. As was foretold: “You will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one experience corruption.” (Psalm 16:10) He entered the grave as a conqueror disguised as a victim. He passed through death, and in doing so He stripped it of its power. And now, in Christ, all will be made alive. This is not the revival of the old man, not the resuscitation of the flesh as it was under Adam’s curse, but the beginning of new and incorruptible life. Just as the fall of Adam spread death to all mankind, so the Resurrection of Christ plants the seed of life into all who are joined to Him through baptism, faith, and obedience.

The enemy is defeated, the grave is emptied, and the tombstone rolled away not by the hand of man, but by the hand of God. The Cross has become the Tree of Life. The grave, once the ironclad fortress of the devil, is now the open gate of the Kingdom. Death, the last enemy, has been

destroyed not by human strength but by the dying and rising of the Son of God.

The Cross was His weapon, and His Resurrection is His victory. The Cross, that brutal instrument of humiliation, has become the sceptre of the King. What the world saw as defeat was, in truth, conquest. As the Apostle says, “He disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it.” (Colossians 2:15) On the Cross, Christ laid waste to the powers of darkness. He bore the full weight of sin, and in that final hour declared, “It is finished.” (John 19:30) He did not say, I am finished. He said, It is finished — the curse, the reign of death, the tyranny of the devil. And when His lifeless body was laid in the tomb, the earth itself trembled, because the King was not conquered — He had descended to conquer.

As the Psalm says, “You will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one experience corruption.” (Psalm 16:10) These are not words of wishful thinking but a prophecy fulfilled with unshakable certainty. The Lord entered the domain of the dead, but death could not defile

Him. The Eternal Word, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, wrapped in human flesh, descended into Hades not as a captive, but as a conqueror. The iron gates were rent from their hinges, the bars shattered, the locks broken. The dark dominion that had held humanity in terror since the fall of Adam shook to its foundations at the arrival of the Immortal One. Hades was stripped bare. The grave stood plundered. The Lord of Life passed through its gates, and the prisoners heard His voice. As the Church sings, "Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and upon those in the tombs bestowing life." This is no poet's flourish. This is the fact of history. This is the true Pascha. The old Passover, kept by the children of Israel, delivered them from Egypt, that house of slavery, and led them through the Red Sea to the Promised Land. But this new Pascha is greater. This is the Passover not from one country to another, but from death to life, from corruption to incorruption, from bondage to freedom, from the dominion of Satan to the Kingdom of God. This is the Exodus of mankind, led not by Moses, but by Christ Himself, the Lamb who was slain and who lives for evermore.

And what does this mean for us? It means everything. This is not a feast for the stomach, for painted eggs, for sweet breads, and polite handshakes. It is not a feast of sentiment, of soft emotions and seasonal piety. It is a feast of life from the dead. It is the proclamation that the grave is no longer the end, that death no longer speaks the last word. As St. John Chrysostom preached so many centuries ago, his words thundering down through the ages: no one is left out of this victory. The doors of the banquet hall are flung wide open. Whether you have kept the fast with strictness or arrived with empty hands, whether you laboured from the first hour or slumbered until the eleventh, the Risen Lord calls all to His table. The grace of the Resurrection is offered freely, because the price has already been paid in full by the Blood of Christ.

However, we must bear in mind that this is no excuse for idleness or indifference. Grace is not licence. Mercy is not indulgence. The empty tomb is not an invitation to return to the filth of sin but a summons to repentance and holiness. The Resurrection is the dawn of new life, not the validation of the old one. If Christ is risen, then

sin must die. If Christ is risen, then the Christian must rise from his spiritual grave, cast off the old man, and walk in the newness of life, as the Apostle commands: “Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.” (Romans 6:4)

The feast is not for the careless. It is not a yearly ritual to be observed and then forgotten. The Resurrection is the foundation of all Christian life. If you confess that Christ is risen, then your life must bear the marks of that confession: prayer, fasting, alms-giving, forgiveness, humility, and the constant struggle against the passions. For as surely as Christ is risen from the dead, He will come again to judge the living and the dead, and His Kingdom will have no end.

Christ’s Resurrection is the cornerstone of the Church, the cause of our hope, and the pledge of our own rising. Without it, the Church is nothing but a hollow shell, an empty husk, another human institution decaying under the weight of the world’s corruption. If Christ is not risen, then the

Gospel is a lie, the Apostles are false witnesses, and your faith is in vain — as St. Paul says bluntly, “If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.” (1 Corinthians 15:17) But Christ is risen — and this fact stands at the centre of all we believe, all we confess, all we suffer, and all we hope.

The Resurrection is not a decoration upon the faith. It is the foundation stone, without which the whole house collapses. It is not a comforting story, but the very oxygen of the Church’s life. The martyrs did not endure the sword, the cross, the fire, and the wild beasts for the sake of an idea or a philosophy. They faced death without flinching because they knew that death itself had been conquered by the One who rose on the third day. The Resurrection is the Church’s living heart, the cause of our hope, and the promise that our own graves will one day stand empty. If we die with Him, we shall also live with Him. This is the Christian inheritance, this is the unbreakable word of the Lord. St. Paul does not deal in soft assurances or poetic sentiment when he writes, but in hard certainty: “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptised into Christ Jesus were

baptised into his death?.” (Romans 6:3) This is not a metaphor, and it is not a ritual gesture. Baptism is not the outward symbol of an inner choice. It is not the religious equivalent of joining a club. Baptism is death. The old man, born in Adam, burdened with sin, enslaved to the passions, is drowned in those waters. And if that old man is not left in the grave, then baptism was nothing but a bath.

If the old man has truly died, then the new man must rise. This is the logic of the Resurrection. Christ did not rise from the dead so that men could remain as they were. He rose so that mankind could be recreated, refashioned, remade in His own likeness. Baptism is the first death, and the Resurrection is the first life. The water is the grave, and the font is the tomb from which the new man emerges, clothed not in mortal flesh alone, but in the righteousness of Christ. As St. Paul teaches further: “So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.” (Romans 6:11) Therefore, if we have been joined to Christ, we must no longer live as slaves of sin. There is no compromise. There is no middle ground. One cannot serve the risen Christ

and remain in bondage to the old master. The old man must stay in the grave, and if he tries to rise, he must be struck down again by repentance, by confession, by fasting, by prayer, and by the cutting off of the passions. A Christian who lives as if Christ has not risen, lives as if he himself has not been baptised. He lives as if the Cross and the Tomb were empty of meaning, as if sin still reigns and death still rules. However, we know that Christ is risen. The tomb is empty. The old world has passed away. The new world has dawned, and the new man must walk in that light. St. Paul said, "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!" (2 Corinthians 5:17) We are no longer citizens of this dying world but heirs of the Kingdom which cannot be shaken.

This is the call of Pascha — not to return to old sins, but to rise to new life. Not to carry the rotting corpse of the old man upon our backs, but to cast him off and walk, upright and unashamed, in the light of the risen Lord. The Resurrection is the pledge and the proof that death does not have the final word — but neither does sin. The Christian life is the life of the Risen Christ in us.

Let us then walk as those who know the end of the story — death defeated, Christ triumphant.

Do not let this world lull you back to sleep, as if Pascha were just another day on the calendar, something to observe once a year with flowers, candles, and outward ceremony, only to return the next morning to the same sins, the same indifference, the same godless routine. Pascha is not a holiday. It is the very heartbeat of the Church. The Resurrection of Christ is not seasonal. It is not tied to the cycle of spring, nor to the traditions of human custom. It is the condition of the Church's existence, the air we breathe, the light by which we see, the very reason the Church stands at all.

Every Divine Liturgy is Pascha. When the priest lifts up the Lamb and declares, "The Holy Things for the holy," it is Pascha. When the faithful receive the Body and Blood of the Risen Christ, it is Pascha. When the Gospel is read, when the Creed is confessed, when the doxology is chanted, the Church stands before the empty tomb. The Liturgy is not a memorial for the dead, it is the banquet of the living Christ, the marriage supper of the Lamb. The altar is the Mount of

Olives; the chalice is the cup of immortality. Every Divine Service, from Vespers to Matins, from Compline to Akathist, is rooted in the victory of the empty tomb. We do not gather as those left behind to mourn a fallen leader, but as those who worship a living and reigning King. Every prayer uttered by Christian lips is addressed to the living Christ. Every prostration is made before the throne of the risen and glorified Son of God. Every candle lit is a testimony that the darkness is defeated. Every icon kissed is a declaration that the Word has become flesh, has died, and has risen again, and that this flesh is sanctified, not discarded. The Resurrection is not the ending of the Gospel, it is the foundation upon which the whole life of the Church is built.

And the Resurrection is also the judgement of the world. Do not imagine it is some private comfort for the pious. The empty tomb is not up for debate. It stands as the eternal verdict upon the whole world. The Resurrection forces a choice upon every soul: either Christ is risen, or He is not. There is no third way, no neutral ground, no safe distance from this fact. If Christ is risen, the world must repent, must turn from its idolatry, its

violence, its corruption, and its rebellion. If He is not, then all is lost, the Apostles are liars, the martyrs are fools, and we are still dead in our sins.

Christ is risen! This is the fixed point upon which all creation turns. Time itself has been divided. The old world, the world ruled by sin and death, was ended the moment the stone rolled away from that tomb. The new world began in Christ — a world where death is defeated, where life reigns, where mercy is poured out like an inexhaustible flood, and where the devil's dominion has been broken. The only question left for you, brothers and sisters, is this: in which world will you live? “He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters.” (Luke 11:23) The Resurrection demands loyalty, not half-hearted observance. The one who will not bow before the Risen Lord now will be bowed down under the unbearable weight of his own sins when the Lord returns to judge the living and the dead. That day will not wait upon your convenience. The trumpet will sound, the tombs will be opened, and every eye will see Him. The only safety is to stand with Christ now, to

confess Him now, to live as a citizen of His Kingdom now.

The modern churches — those hollowed-out shells draped in the tattered robes of once-living tradition — have reduced Christ to a mere ethical teacher, a wandering moralist, a harmless sage fit for classrooms and children's books. They have stripped the Gospel of its power and gutted the Resurrection of its reality, treating it as a myth, a metaphor, a comforting fable for the weak-minded who cannot face the so-called "facts" of the grave. They light their candles not for the Living Christ but for a corpse. They sing hymns to a memory, not to a King. Their altars are bare of life, their prayers float no higher than the ceiling, and their sacraments, if they dare to speak the word, are empty vessels. But we — the One Holy Church — we do not gather to mourn the dead. We serve a Living Christ. We stand before the Throne of the One who trampled death by death. We eat His Body and drink His Blood, as He Himself commanded: "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day." (John 6:54) This is not allegory. This is not symbol. This is the

terrible and unshakable promise of the Risen One. The same Body that hung upon the Cross, the same Blood that flowed from His side, are given to the faithful at every Liturgy. And those who receive them with fear and faith do not taste death — they pass through it, into life eternal.

Let the world tremble, let the devils shriek from the abyss, let the kings and presidents and global merchants write their decrees and boast of their power. Christ is risen, and death lies stripped bare. The grave is plundered. Hades is in ruins. The Church stands unshaken, not because of her clever bishops or her costly vestments, not because of stone cathedrals or academic credentials, but because the Crucified and Risen Christ is her Head. And this Head cannot be decapitated, cannot be overthrown, cannot be bought, and cannot be silenced.

Let the Ecumenical Patriarch bow and scrape before earthly thrones like a courtier drunk on his own relevance. Let the Pope preach the gospel of globalist unity and ecological salvation, reducing the Cross to a prop for his politics. Let the hirelings, the wolves in cassocks, scatter the

sheep and sell the faith for thirty pieces of modern silver. The Lord remains the same. The Church remains the same. “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” (Hebrews 13:8)

The empty tomb has settled the question for all time. The Resurrection is the fact against which all lies shatter. The world will pass away, its rulers will pass away, its heresies will pass away, its empires will fall and its ideologies will rot, but the risen Christ stands forever. And the Church, His Bride, will stand with Him, bloodied perhaps, slandered certainly, persecuted without doubt — but unbroken.

Let the world make peace with death if it dares, but let the Church proclaim life, now and unto the ages of ages.

So, my beloved brethren, let this day — this holy and radiant Pascha — be not the end of a season but the beginning of a life worthy of the Risen Christ. Let it not be a day that passes like smoke, like the world’s hollow festivals, but a dividing line — the hour when you finally cast aside all

compromise, all half-measures, all entanglements with sin, all the dead habits and excuses which chain the soul to the earth. Christ has not risen so that you may remain the same. He did not shatter the gates of Hades so that you might wander back inside like a fool returning to his vomit. The tomb is empty. The path is clear. There is no turning back. You have seen the light of the Resurrection. You have heard the Gospel. You have tasted the immortal and life-giving Mysteries. You have been baptised into His death and raised in His life. Do not return to the grave. Do not return to the world which lies in the power of the Evil One. Do not let your confession today turn to silence tomorrow. The Risen Christ does not ask for part of your heart — He demands all of it. There is no room for divided loyalties, no room for Christ and Mammon, no room for Christ and comfort, no room for Christ and your own self-will. The Cross is not an ornament; it is your path. The Resurrection is not an event to remember; it is the life you must now live.

Stand firm, as the Apostle commands: “Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you

know that in the Lord your labour is not in vain.” (1 Corinthians 15:58) The world will tell you it is in vain. The world will mock, scorn, and tempt you back to sleep. Let it howl. The empty tomb stands as the pledge that all is not in vain. Every tear shed for Christ is counted. Every struggle against sin is seen. Every prayer, every fast, every good work done in the name of the Risen Lord is written in the Book of Life. The labour of the faithful is never wasted, because the One for whom you labour is not dead. Christ is Risen, and the Church marches on, from victory unto victory, until the day when He returns in glory, and the last trumpet sounds, and the dead are raised incorruptible. Be ready for that day. Let no one find you slumbering when the Bridegroom comes. Fill your lamps with oil. Clothe yourselves in the light of the Resurrection, and walk as children of the day. The night is far gone. The Day has dawned.

Christ is Risen! Indeed, He is Risen! Let this be your banner in life, your comfort in death, and your song unto ages of ages. Amen.

Walking the Narrow Way of Christ

The words of our Saviour in Matthew 7:13-14 stand as a sharp rebuke to the easy-going spirit of this present age, and to every soft-hearted delusion which imagines that the Kingdom of Heaven is obtained without effort or cost: “Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it.” These words are not the ornamental advice of a religious teacher seeking admirers, nor are they the sentimental platitudes of the modern pulpit. They are the command of the King, the Creator, the Judge of the living and the dead. Our Lord does not give permission for men to fashion their own path toward salvation. He gives clear instruction. The wide and easy road leads to destruction — not to temporary misfortune, but to eternal ruin, and the Lord adds with dreadful clarity that many walk it. This is the true state of the world. Few will take the narrow road, because few are willing to sacrifice their self-will, to crucify their pride, and to tear out their sinful pleasures by the root. The wide road

promises comfort, ease, and worldly satisfaction, but it is nothing but the road to Gehenna.

The narrow path, on the other hand, is not paved with the sweet consolations and flatteries of this world, but with thorns, crosses, and the constant warfare against the passions. It is the royal road of obedience, ascetic struggle, and self-denial. It is the way by which the saints were sanctified, the martyrs were crowned, and the ascetics inherited the Kingdom of Heaven. The Saviour walked this path before us, bearing His Cross upon His torn and bruised shoulders, and He bids every one of His disciples to take up their own cross, to carry it without excuse, without negotiation, and without compromise. There is no other way to follow Christ. To walk any other road is to walk away from Him. This narrow path demands the death of the old man within us — the man of vanity, self-love, and lust for comfort — so that the new man, created in Christ, might live. The path of Christ will not twist itself to accommodate the ever-shifting fashions, whims, and false doctrines of a world sick with rebellion against God. It is not subject to modern tastes or opinions. The path is narrow because it is carved out by divine

commandments, and because it leaves no room for the swollen ego of modern man. It does not widen itself for the benefit of the ecumenists, the modernists, or the sentimental deceivers who preach cheap grace and easy salvation. It remains fixed and unbending, regardless of the century, regardless of the culture, regardless of human protest. This is the path walked by the holy martyrs who were torn apart by lions, burned alive, and beheaded rather than deny Christ. This is the path walked by the confessors who endured exile, imprisonment, and scorn rather than renounce the Faith. This is the path walked by the ascetics, who fled the cities and the comforts of the world to struggle alone in the deserts and the forests, conquering the flesh and the devil by prayer and fasting. This is the path of the saints — not of the spiritually indifferent — and it remains the only path that leads to life eternal. There is no broad and comfortable road to the Kingdom of Heaven. The path is narrow, and it will remain narrow until the end of the age.

To walk this narrow path is to declare total war against the corruption of this fallen world — not in hidden whispers or safe corners, but openly,

publicly, and without apology. The corruption we face today is not new in essence, but it wears a fresh disguise: it parades itself under noble-sounding names — liberty, progress, dignity, self-expression. But these are hollow idols, false freedoms that lead to bondage, and Saint Paul unmasks them with force in Romans 12:2, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God — what is good and acceptable and perfect.” The Christian is not permitted to walk in the ways of the world, not even slightly. Conformity is enmity with God. The soul must be re-formed by grace, not re-shaped by popular opinion. What the world praises today, God has condemned from the beginning. What the world despises, God has sanctified. We must never forget that we have been set apart — not to be admired, but to be holy. We are not here to be accepted, but to be faithful.

The wide road is not only the path of atheists and blasphemers. It is the road of the lukewarm, the careless, and the cowardly — those who confess Christ with the lips but deny Him in deeds. It is the road of spiritual indifference, of polite

tolerance for heresy, of compromise with sin for the sake of comfort or reputation. It is the way of those who behave as if the commandments of God were optional, or as if God were too merciful to care whether we obey Him. But the narrow path does not allow such delusions. It demands daily repentance, not sentimental remorse but the cutting off of sin at the root. It demands vigilance, the guarding of the mind, the censoring of thoughts, the scrutiny of speech, and the discipline of the body. The Church Fathers speak again and again of *nepsis*, watchfulness — the constant sobriety of soul that prevents spiritual sleep. Without this, the soul becomes prey to demons.

The narrow way requires not tolerance of sin, but hatred of it. In the Psalms, we read: “I hate every false way.” (Psalm 119:104) It is not enough to dislike sin. It must be hated as poison, as filth, as death. If a man entertains it, excuses it, or lets it linger, it will master him. The saints did not become holy by partial repentance or occasional resistance. They waged total war. They cut off hands and gouged out eyes — not literally, but spiritually, as the Lord commands in Matthew

5:29-30. One cannot tread this path with one foot in the world and one foot in the Church. The path is narrow because it allows only the man who is wholly committed to Christ. It is fenced about — not loosely, but firmly — by the holy canons of the Church, which are not suggestions but divinely inspired safeguards. It is lined with the teachings of the Holy Fathers, whose ascetical wisdom exposes every deceit of the enemy. It is illumined by the Holy Scriptures, which must be read not with rebellious sentiment, but within the mind of the Church, preserved unbroken from Pentecost until now.

The Christian who walks this path must be ready to suffer — not only physical suffering, but the scorn, isolation, and hatred of the world. He must be willing to be mocked by the crowd, hated by the media, and despised by friends and family who have bowed before the spirit of the age. Loyalty to Christ is not admired in this world — it is loathed. And yet the path must be walked. If the world praises you, beware, for the Lord said, “Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.” (Luke 6:26) Our loyalty is not to the shifting sand

of modern opinion, but to Christ the King, Who reigns eternally. His way is not popular, but it is true. His way is not comfortable, but it is holy. His way is not easy, but it is the only way that leads to life. The Saviour not only preached this narrow path with words, but carved it into the earth with His own footsteps, leaving mankind without defence, without excuse, and without delay. From His Nativity to His Ascension, He walked the road of obedience, the path of suffering, and the way of utter self-emptying. The eternal Son of God, enthroned beyond all worlds, humbled Himself to be born in a cave, in swaddling clothes, laid not upon silk but upon straw, teaching us from the cradle that the path to His Kingdom begins with self-abasement. He, Whose word summoned the stars, lived in poverty, possessing not even a place to lay His head, as He Himself declared, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." (Luke 9:58) He tasted hunger and thirst, not because He lacked power, but because He desired to show that man shall not live by bread alone, but by the will of God. He endured mockery, spitting, scourging, betrayal, and stood calm and unshaken before both Pilate's tribunal and the Sanhedrin's

assembly — a silent rebuke to every Christian who seeks comfort, popularity, and the approval of the world.

Christ's life is the perfect pattern of the narrow way, a path drenched in blood, not paved in comforts. He commands plainly, without the false softness of modern preaching. "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me." (Luke 9:23) Here the Saviour does not promise personal growth, inner peace, or social success. He demands self-denial. The daily cross is not a decorative symbol, but the sign of death to the world, death to the passions, death to the old man who clings to his pride, greed, and lust. The Christian life is crucifixion from beginning to end. Without the cross, there is no crown. Without self-denial, there is no salvation.

The saints, whom the world pretends to honour but never wishes to imitate, became saints by this path alone. They did not bargain with God for an easier road, nor did they seek to blend the Gospel with the spirit of the age. Their souls were tempered in the furnace of affliction. Their pride,

which is the root of every sin, was stripped away like rotting flesh from a wound. Their worldly ambitions were slaughtered upon the altar of obedience. They did not seek after the favour of princes or the applause of crowds. Some were kings who forsook their thrones. Some were merchants who abandoned their wealth. Others were labourers and peasants who embraced hardship with gladness, for they saw that earthly glory, wealth, and status are baited traps laid by the enemy, designed to ensnare the soul in vanity and pride. The narrow way permits no attachment to such things. The Lord Himself warns that no man can serve two masters. "You cannot serve God and wealth." (Matthew 6:24) The soul that binds itself to earthly riches and honours will find that these things are millstones, dragging it downward to destruction. The saints cast off all such fetters, and followed Christ in poverty of spirit, in chastity of heart, in obedience unto death. Their example leaves us without excuse. The way has already been walked by Christ. The martyrs and ascetics followed after Him, and the Church still points to the same road, narrow as ever, unchanged by the passing centuries. There is no alternative path for those

who would enter the Kingdom of God. One must take up the Cross, or one will never wear the crown.

In the end, there are no alternative routes, no clever detours, no secret arrangements to enter the Kingdom of God. There is only one path, and Christ Himself has marked it plainly — narrow, steep, and hard. The wide road is the road of self-will, of pride, of self-justification, of endless excuses, of lawlessness disguised as personal freedom. Its pavement is smooth because it is greased with human vanity. It is filled with the self-satisfied, the religiously indifferent, and the morally blind — and it leads with certainty to everlasting ruin. The world prefers this road because it costs nothing at the beginning, but the price at the end is eternal. The narrow path, on the other hand, demands everything at the beginning — self-denial, crucifixion of the passions, loyalty to Christ against the world — but it ends in life, joy, and the unending light of the Kingdom.

The narrow path is not an optional discipline for monks, nor is it reserved for the especially pious,

nor for the isolated few who “take religion seriously.” It is the single, non-negotiable obligation of every baptised Christian, whether man or woman, married or celibate, young or old, rich or poor. Baptism is the beginning of this walk, not the end of it. Once marked with the seal of the Holy Chrism, the Christian is bound under oath to walk the path of Christ, not the path of the age. Saint James leaves no room for polite excuses when he writes: “Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?” (James 4:4) This world, with its fashionable ideologies and decaying morals, offers temporary pleasures, but at the price of eternal death. One cannot walk with Christ and with the world at the same time. To try is to deceive oneself and to stand already condemned.

To walk this narrow way is to bind oneself, soul and body, to Christ the King — not as a passing affection or a Sunday ritual, but as the defining and ruling purpose of one’s entire life. It is to forsake the false comforts of the world, which vanish like smoke, and to walk daily in the fear of God, grounded in repentance, labouring in unceasing prayer, and placing hope only in the

mercy of Christ, not in the crumbling securities of the age. The road is hard, but it is the only road worth walking. Salvation is not handed to the comfortable. The Kingdom is not inherited by those who entertain the world's values and live as spiritual vagrants. It is possessed by those who endure the path with constancy, with courage, and with unswerving faithfulness until their last breath.

The words of our Saviour close the argument beyond all debate — “The one who endures to the end will be saved.” (Matthew 24:13) Not the one who begins the race. Not the one who claims Christ with his lips while bowing to the world's idols with his heart. Endurance is the mark of true faith. This is the narrow path — walked by the saints, commanded by Christ, and offered to every man who would dare call himself a Christian. There is no other way. The world mocks it, but the Kingdom belongs to those who walk it.

Palm Sunday, Homily on John 12:1-18

Today we stand on the threshold of Holy Week. The Church sets before our eyes the Lord's approach to His Passion—not in isolation, but in the context of both a great miracle and a great betrayal. The Gospel passage for Palm Sunday is not limited to the Lord's entry into Jerusalem; it begins in Bethany, where the scent of pure nard and the stench of impending death intermingle.

Let us think about each of the verses with attention to what the Church has always known, what the Fathers have always taught, and what Holy Scripture reveals without ambiguity.

In this homily, I will be using verses from the *New Revised Standard Version*, Catholic Edition. Verse 1. "Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead." This is the context of everything that follows. The Lord does not go to Jerusalem directly, though it is near. He first enters Bethany. The name "Bethany" means "house of affliction" or "house of the poor." Here we see the Lord beginning His Passion in the

house of affliction, among those who had already tasted death and mourning. And not just any house, but the house of Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead. The raising of Lazarus is not an isolated miracle; it is the final and deliberate sign of the Lord's identity before His crucifixion. It is the spark that drives the Sanhedrin to plot His death definitively. By raising Lazarus, Christ proclaims in action what He will soon accomplish in His own body. He does not merely resuscitate; He gives life. The Lord does not reverse death momentarily, but overthrows it. The Jews could not endure such a testimony, and so Lazarus himself becomes a threat.

In the second verse, we read: "There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him." This is not a banquet of indulgence. It is a supper in honour of the Lord who conquers death. Martha, always active, serves—as is her station and gift. Lazarus reclines at table. Consider the great reversal here—the one who was in the tomb four days now shares the meal with the Author of life. It is important to note that Lazarus says nothing in this Gospel account. He does not give a speech.

He does not recount a vision of the afterlife. His very presence is his witness. This is deeply Orthodox in character. Our witness is not in novelty or emotional spectacle but in the fact of the Resurrection. The quiet, enduring presence of the one raised is enough.

The third verse: “Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus’ feet, and wiped them with her hair.” Mary’s act is one of reckless devotion. This is not practicality. It is not restraint. It is not rational stewardship. It is love poured out, costly and public. In anointing the feet of Christ and wiping them with her hair, she expresses a love that is self-humbling and scandalous to the world. I pray we are never afraid to love Christ with such extravagance. The Church, in her worship, does not deal in utility. She deals in love. That is why we have icons, incense, chant, prostrations. Never listen to those who say we must strip the Church of her beauty in the name of the poor. That lie came from Judas.

In the fourth and fifth verses, we read: “Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples... said, ‘Why was this

perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?” Here is the voice of pious theft. Judas cloaks his greed in moral posturing. This is the beginning of betrayal, when false virtue becomes a weapon against Christ. How often do we hear this same voice in the modern world? Judas does not care for the poor. He is interested in control and in theft. Today we still see those who use the language of charity to gut the Church of reverence, order, obedience, and holiness. They sell false compassion and call it virtue.

We read in the seventh verse that our Lord did not excuse Judas out of politeness. He exposed him. “Jesus said, ‘Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial.’” Christ accepted the anointing as preparation for His burial. He knew what was to come. There is no panic in Him. The anointing is not for display, not for praise, but for death. Mary understands more than the disciples. She sees the coming darkness and acts accordingly. She is not calculating value. She is anticipating sacrifice. In the Church, we must do the same. We do not measure the value of our prayers, our liturgies,

our fasts, in worldly terms. We offer them for the sake of the Lord's burial, knowing that unless we die with Him, we cannot live with Him.

We continue in the eighth verse. "You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me." This verse unsettles the modern mind. But Christ is not engaging in sentimentalism. He is stating reality. The poor are always among us because the world is fallen. But Christ, in the flesh, was with them only for a time. The Church must always serve the poor, but never at the expense of neglecting the presence of Christ. If your service to the poor is done while mocking or abandoning the liturgy, the sacraments, the commandments—you are no better than Judas.

In the tenth and eleventh verses we read of the spiritual madness of the chief priests. "So the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death as well, since it was on account of him that many... were believing in Jesus." They seek to kill a man who had been raised from the dead, to silence the evidence of the miracle. How great is the hardness of the heart that prefers death to repentance. Yet we see this even now—hatred of

holiness, hatred of repentance, hatred of the evidence that Christ is Lord. The Church must expect this. We do not make peace with the world. It was the world that crucified our Lord.

Let us continue with verses 12 and 13. “The next day the great crowd... took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, shouting, ‘Hosanna!’” Now comes the great moment. The Lord enters Jerusalem not in glory but in meekness. He does not ride a war horse. He sits upon a donkey’s colt. He comes as King, but not as the kings of this world. The palm branches are not for decoration. They are signs of victory, drawn from Jewish tradition, used at the Feast of Tabernacles to celebrate God’s deliverance. Yet the people do not fully understand. They shout “Hosanna,” which means “Save us now,” but most are thinking of political salvation. This is why many of them will shout “Crucify Him” within the week. They do not want a King of suffering. They want a king of victory without sacrifice. The true King enters to die.

We read a prophecy in the fifteenth verse. “Do not be afraid, daughter of Zion. Look, your king is

coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!" This is the prophecy of Zechariah fulfilled. But it is not only poetic. The donkey is a beast of burden, not of war. Christ rides the creature of service and humility. The Church likewise must move in humility and simplicity. Not in the pride of the modernist theologian or the marketing schemes of religious opportunists, but in the patient, faithful walk of the donkey.

Verse 16 says: "His disciples did not understand these things at first... then they remembered." This is a vital lesson. The disciples did not understand at the time. Understanding came after the resurrection. So it is with us. We do not always grasp what God is doing. We do not always see the meaning of the commandments or the trials we endure. But in the light of the Resurrection, we begin to understand. Do not demand full comprehension before obedience. That is not faith.

In verses 17 through 18, "The crowd... continued to testify... because they heard that he had performed this sign." Here we see the danger of fascination without conversion. The crowd

gathers not because they understand Christ's mission, nor because they seek repentance, but because of spectacle. They are astounded that a man four days dead was raised. They are gripped by the magnitude of the miracle. Their mouths testify, but their hearts are not yet transformed. They follow Jesus, but for what purpose? Not to deny themselves and take up their cross, but to marvel, to be entertained, perhaps even to benefit. This is not new. In John 6:26, after the feeding of the five thousand, our Lord rebukes the crowds: "Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves." They pursued Him for their stomachs. Here in chapter 12, they pursue Him for their curiosity. But faith that is driven by wonder alone is unstable. What do we see just a few days later? The same city that shouted "Hosanna" will soon cry out, "Away with him! Crucify him!" (John 19:15). This is what happens when belief is built on signs and not on the Cross.

Miracles in the Church are real. They are given for a purpose. They confirm the truth. They testify to the grace of God. But they are not the

centre. They are never to replace the Cross. The Lord Himself warns in Matthew 12:39, “An evil and adulterous generation asks for a sign, but no sign will be given... except the sign of the prophet Jonah.” The sign of Jonah is the Lord’s death and burial—three days in the tomb. That is the sign that matters. That is the sign upon which the Church stands. The Holy Church in every generation is tempted to become a theatre of signs, wonders, and emotion. Some clergy chase after visions, bleeding icons, and miraculous oil not as a means of drawing the faithful to repentance but to attract attention, to fill pews, or worse—to justify their own spiritual negligence. This is not Orthodoxy. This is vainglory in cassocks.

The saints worked miracles, yes—but always in humility, and often in secrecy. Saint Seraphim of Sarov shone with light, but he did not build his ministry on such displays. He called for repentance. Saint John of Kronstadt, who healed many, directed all attention to the Eucharist and the life of the Church. Saint Paisios of Mount Athos worked wonders, but always pointed back

to the necessity of enduring pain, humbling the will, and embracing the Cross.

Let us be clear—when the Church preaches miracles without preaching repentance, when she emphasises signs without obedience, when she promotes wonders but neglects asceticism, she loses her voice and becomes no different than the crowds who came only to stare at Lazarus. Our Lord did not come to entertain. He came to suffer. He did not ride into Jerusalem to display signs, but to ascend the Cross. Any Church that refuses to follow Him up Golgotha is no Church at all. We are not saved because we saw a miracle. We are saved because the Lamb of God was slain and rose again. The Apostle Paul says, “We proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles.” (1 Corinthians 1:23) He does not say “we proclaim visions,” or “we proclaim ecstasies.” He says Christ crucified. The true miracle is not Lazarus walking out of his tomb, but Christ walking into His tomb willingly.

And so the Church must proclaim the Cross. Always the Cross. Because only the Cross crushes pride. Only the Cross unmask the deceit of the

devil. Only the Cross opens the gate of Paradise. Anything else, even a sign from heaven, is dust if it does not lead to Golgotha and beyond it, the empty tomb. The crowd came for a miracle. Let us come for the Crucified Lord. Let us not shout Hosanna with shallow hearts. Let us stand firm with the Theotokos and Saint John at the foot of the Cross. For there, and only there, is true faith. There is salvation.

Brethren, Palm Sunday is not a celebration of quickly passing popularity. It is the beginning of the Lord's Passion. We see the anointing for burial, the corruption of Judas, the plotting of the priests, the cries of a crowd that does not understand, and the entry of the King who will be slain. May we never follow the crowd who shouts one day and betrays the next. Let us be like Mary, who loved Him with the costly gift; like Lazarus, who witnessed silently by his very being; like the donkey, who carried the Lord with no pride.

Let us go with Him to the Cross, not in confusion but in obedience. For the Cross is the throne of the King, and the tomb is the gateway to life.

God is Present in His Church

The Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Holy Trinity, is not an abstract principle or a vague influence. He is God, co-eternal and consubstantial with the Father and the Son—"the Lord, the Giver of Life," as we confess in the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, which was formulated and defended by the Fathers of the First and Second Ecumenical Councils against the heresies of their day.

From the beginning, the Holy Spirit has been active. In the first words of Genesis, "the spirit of God swept over the face of the waters." (Genesis 1:2) This is not poetic imagery. It is the Spirit Himself, hovering, preparing, ordering, bringing forth creation. He is not limited to a moment in history. His work is continuous. He gives breath to man, wisdom to the prophets, strength to the martyrs, grace to the saints, and unity to the Church. As we read in the Psalms, "When thou sendest forth thy Spirit, they are created; and thou renewest the face of the ground." (Psalm 104:30, RSV-CE)

The Holy Spirit acts definitively in the sacraments, which are not symbolic gestures but the very instruments by which God communicates His life to man. In Baptism, the Spirit regenerates the soul. In Chrismation, He seals the newly illumined with the anointing of grace. Saint Paul wrote, “For in the one Spirit we were all baptised into one body... and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.” (1 Corinthians 12:13) The Apostolic Church does not baptise into an ideology or a philosophy, but into the Body of Christ, and it is the Holy Spirit who makes this possible.

The Divine Liturgy itself is unthinkable without the Holy Spirit. In the Anaphora, the celebrant calls down the Spirit in the epiclesis, not as a poetic expression but as a sacred reality—so that the bread and wine become the true Body and Blood of Christ. Without the Spirit, there is no Church. The Church is not an institution or a society; it is the Body of Christ enlivened by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit binds the faithful together in one mind, one heart, and one confession.

In the lives of the faithful, the Spirit is the

Comforter and the Teacher. He does not speak on His own, but teaches what He hears from the Son (cf. John 16:13). He is not a silent observer, but the very One who enables prayer, gives repentance, strengthens in temptation, illumines the mind, and purifies the conscience. “Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness... that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words” (Romans 8:26). The fruits of the Spirit—“love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Galatians 5:22–23)—are not moral improvements. They are evidence of the Spirit’s work in the soul. Without Him, these things are impossible. The saints are not moral heroes. They are vessels of the Holy Spirit, cleansed through ascetic struggle, humility, and grace.

The Orthodox Christian cannot live without the Holy Spirit. He is present in the Jesus Prayer whispered in the dark. He is present in the tears of repentance. He is present in the quiet strength of those who endure suffering with faith. As Saint Symeon the New Theologian taught, the experience of the Holy Spirit is the very sign of true Christianity. If a man claims to be a Christian

but knows nothing of the Holy Spirit, he has not yet begun.

It must be said plainly—the Spirit is not known through emotionalism, nor is He given to those outside the Body of Christ in its fulness. The grace of Pentecost abides in the one Holy Church. She alone has preserved the fulness of Apostolic tradition, both in doctrine and in sacrament. The Holy Spirit does not contradict Himself. He does not lead the faithful into schism, innovation, or doctrinal decay. He speaks what is from the Father, and this is handed down unchanged through the Fathers, the councils, and the liturgical life of the Church.

He is “everywhere present and filling all things,” as we say in the prayer to the Holy Spirit. But He fills only those who are emptied of pride and sin, who submit themselves to the life of the Church, who confess the ancient faith without compromise. It is through the Spirit that we are sanctified, strengthened, and preserved unto eternal life. Without Him, the Christian falls into delusion or despair. With Him, the faithful are

made steadfast, not by human effort, but by the grace of God working within.

This is not a matter of speculation or poetic imagery. It is the unchanging teaching of the Orthodox Church, confirmed by the Bible, upheld by the Fathers, and lived by the saints. Let no one speak lightly of the Holy Spirit. He is God. He is present. And He is not mocked.

Outside the Ark is the Flood

Once you come to understand the authority that Christ gave to His apostles, and what they passed down to those in their time, you will eventually realise how lost many within the Protestant denominations are. This authority was not abstract or theoretical—it was tangible, hierarchical, and preserved within the visible structure of the Church.

Christ said to the apostles, “Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me.” (Luke 10:16) He breathed the Holy Spirit upon them, gave them the power to forgive sins (John 20:22–23), and commissioned them to go forth not simply with a message but with real authority: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...” (Matthew 28:18-19) That authority was never meant to vanish. The apostles laid hands upon bishops and presbyters, entrusting them with the same teaching, sacramental, and disciplinary authority. St. Paul told St. Timothy, “guard the truth that has been

entrusted to you by the Holy Spirit who dwells within us.” (2 Timothy 1:14). Again, “what you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” (2 Timothy 2:2) This is not democratic interpretation—it is hierarchy and succession. The Protestant break rejected this apostolic succession. It cut itself off from the living continuity of the Church, replacing priesthood with opinion, sacraments with symbolism, and authority with private judgement. Luther and Calvin did not reform—they amputated. They severed themselves from the very Church that gave the world the Bible they claim to revere.

Protestantism, in all its thousands of fragments, has no altar, no priesthood, no Eucharist, and no continuity with the apostles. This is a verifiable, historical reality. When the Protestant reformers broke from the Church, they did not take with them the apostolic ministry. They rejected the sacramental priesthood, denied the grace of Holy Orders, and in doing so, forfeited any claim to apostolic succession.

An altar is not a table for sermons. It is the place

of sacrifice. The divine liturgy offered upon the altar is the same Eucharist instituted by Christ at the Mystical Supper, handed down through unbroken succession from the apostles. The Protestant communities, having rejected the very concept of priesthood, cannot offer the same Eucharist, for they have neither the consecrated clergy nor the apostolic lineage required to perform such a mystery. Their “communion services” are nothing more than commemorations, devoid of the real presence of Christ, because they lack both the sacerdotal authority and the sacramental form.

They claim the Bible as their sole authority, yet they have no authoritative interpreter. Each man becomes his own bishop and theologian. Each pastor is self-appointed or elected by a committee. This chaos is evident—there are thousands of denominations, each with conflicting doctrines, all claiming the Holy Spirit, and all in disagreement. Some baptise infants; others forbid it. Some believe in the real presence in some undefined way; others deny it entirely. Some accept women as clergy; others reject it. And all of them claim to follow Christ, while

denying the apostolic Church He founded. This is not the faith handed down once for all to the saints (Jude 1:3). This is not the unity Christ prayed for when He said, “that they may be one, as we are one.” (John 17:11) Protestantism is a religion of men—of personal interpretations, emotions, and modern philosophies. It is built on the shifting sands our Lord condemned in Matthew 7:26–27: “And every one who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house upon the sand; and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell; and great was the fall of it.”

By severing themselves from the root—the Church—they cut themselves off from the grace of the sacraments, from the authority of the apostles, and from the fullness of the truth. The Orthodox Church has never changed its doctrine, never introduced novelties, never altered the apostolic faith. She alone stands as the ark of salvation, while Protestantism drifts in endless fragmentation, each new sect a monument to pride and disobedience.

The Church is not an invisible club of believers—it is visible, historical, sacramental, and apostolic. This is not optional; it is fundamental. Our Lord Jesus Christ did not establish an abstract idea or a mystical association of well-meaning individuals. He founded a real, structured, and enduring community—the Church—against which He declared, “the gates of Hades will not prevail.” (Matthew 16:18) This Church has bishops, presbyters, deacons, sacraments, doctrine, liturgy, and canonical discipline. It has a memory, a history, and a continuity that can be traced without rupture back to the apostles themselves.

The Protestant assertion that the Church is invisible—comprised only of those who “truly believe”—is an invention. It is a justification for schism. If the Church is invisible, then no one can identify it, no one can hold it accountable, and no one can be certain of where to find the sacraments. This is contrary to the entire witness of Scripture and the early Church. The apostles appointed successors. They ordained bishops in every city (Titus 1:5). They gathered in council (Acts 15). They administered the sacraments with authority and discipline (1 Corinthians 11, 2

Thessalonians 3:6, 14). None of this suggests an invisible, scattered fellowship. It points to a concrete, recognisable body—the Orthodox Church. It is the Orthodox Church that continues to preserve this reality. It alone has not altered the faith. It has not followed Rome into papal innovations, nor followed the Protestants into doctrinal relativism. It has preserved the same divine liturgy, the same sacramental life, the same theological and moral teachings, the same episcopal succession, and the same ascetical and monastic traditions. No other body on earth can truthfully say this. The Orthodox Church is not one branch among many. It is the Church.

All else is confusion. The Protestant world is a maze of contradictions. By rejecting the Church and her authority, they have placed themselves in an endless cycle of division and doctrinal instability. Every generation produces new splinters. They are united by nothing except the denial of what came before them. And this chaos is not accidental—it is the direct fruit of rebellion. “For God is not a God of confusion but of peace.” (1 Corinthians 14:33) The confusion of

Protestantism is not a mark of God's work; it is the sign of having departed from Him.

Many within the Protestant world are lost because it has departed from the one holy Church. They possess the Scriptures, but outside the Church, they interpret them unto their own destruction (2 Peter 3:16). They speak of Christ, but they have rejected His Body, which is the Church (Colossians 1:18). They claim the Holy Spirit, but deny the very structure and sacramental order through which the Spirit works. They sing hymns, but offer no sacrifice. They gather in buildings, but they do not dwell in the House of God. And outside the Church, there is no salvation. This is not a threat—it is a sober reality. St. Cyprian of Carthage declared plainly, “He cannot have God as Father who does not have the Church as Mother.” The Church is not a vehicle of salvation—it is the place of salvation. To be united to Christ is to be united to His Body. Outside of it, the sacraments are invalid and confusion reigns. There is one Ark, as in the days of Noah. Those outside drowned.

The Orthodox Church stands as that Ark—not

because of our merit, not because of national pride, intellectual sophistication, or moral superiority, but solely because of Christ's promise. "I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it." (Matthew 16:18) This is not a promise to scattered individuals or disconnected groups, but to a visible, apostolic body, guarded by the Holy Spirit and sustained by the Eucharist, the Scriptures, the canons, and the episcopacy. It is Christ Who founded the Church. Not Constantine. Not the apostles by their own initiative. Christ Himself. And it is He Who preserves it, not by human strength, but by divine power. "I am with you always, to the close of the age." (Matthew 28:20) The Orthodox Church did not preserve itself. It has suffered persecution, heresies, betrayals, and imperial collapse. Yet it remains. Why? Because it is Christ's Body on earth. Because it is the pillar and bulwark of the truth (1 Timothy 3:15). And Christ does not abandon His Body.

Everything outside of the Church is broken. This must be stated without hesitation. Protestantism, Roman Catholicism, and every sect and movement that has splintered from the apostolic

foundation, has introduced novelty, compromise, and error. They have added or taken away from the deposit of faith. The papacy is a man-made distortion of episcopal primacy. Protestantism is an outright revolt against apostolic authority. All these stand outside the Ark and attempt to convince the world that planks floating in the flood are ships of salvation.

The Orthodox Church has changed nothing. It has added nothing to the Creed. It has subtracted nothing from the Sacraments. It has never abolished fasting. It has never permitted innovation in moral teaching. It has never rewritten the Divine Liturgy into theatre. It has never made bishops into monarchs or pastors into entertainers. It stands firm where all others have drifted into modernism, liberalism, or autocracy.

The truth does not dwell in fragmentation. Truth, by nature, is one. It does not manifest as a spectrum of conflicting opinions, nor does it take the shape of contradictory theologies competing for legitimacy. The Holy Spirit, Who is the Spirit of truth (John 16:13), does not speak out of both sides of the mouth. The Spirit does not tell one

group that baptism saves and another that it is symbolic. It does not declare to one sect that the Eucharist is the Body and Blood of Christ, and to another that it is a remembrance only. He does not tell one community that the Church must be governed by bishops, and another that all believers are equally pastors. The Holy Spirit does not fracture. He unites. "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism." (Ephesians 4:4–5) Yet Protestantism is a religion of fractures. It arose from rebellion against authority, and it has multiplied by division ever since. When one man's conscience becomes the final authority, schism is inevitable. The Protestant claim that the thousands of denominations are somehow united in "essentials" is dishonest and incoherent. First, there is no common agreement among them on what those "essentials" are. Is baptism essential? Is the Eucharist? Is the Trinity? Is the inerrancy of Scripture? Some say yes, others no. And if one man claims a matter is essential while another denies it, by what authority is the dispute resolved? There is none. Each man becomes a law unto himself, and each congregation a doctrinal

island.

Even on the very Gospel itself, the message is mangled. Some say man is justified by faith alone. Others add baptism. Others insist on a sinner's prayer. Some declare once saved, always saved. Others deny it. This is not unity. It is a cacophony of self-made gospels. "Even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be accursed." (Galatians 1:8). The apostle did not bless innovation. He cursed it.

Novus Ordo Rome, on the other hand, adds to the Gospel. It burdens the faithful with doctrines unknown to the apostles—papal infallibility, the immaculate conception, and so on. None of these can be found in the apostolic witness or the ecumenical councils of the first thousand years. They are inventions—developments which Rome claims were revealed gradually, as though the apostles handed the Church a seedling of truth that would grow into something unrecognisable. But the faith was delivered once for all to the saints (Jude 1:3). It is not an evolving theory. It is a sacred trust to be preserved, not improved upon.

On the other side, most Protestants subtract from the Gospel. They deny the sacraments, reject the priesthood, minimise the role of asceticism, and reduce salvation to an emotional or intellectual assent. They rip pages from the Holy Tradition and attempt to reconstruct the faith with only fragments. They elevate the written word of Scripture while despising the Church which gave it birth and determined its canon. And in doing so, they trade fullness for fragments and authority for confusion.

The Orthodox Church has preserved the Gospel—not modified, not diluted, not expanded. It teaches today what the apostles taught. It celebrates the sacraments as they did. It governs by the episcopal structure they ordained. It fasts as they fasted. It prays as they prayed. It confesses as they confessed. The Orthodox Church has neither added novelties nor embraced subtraction. It has remained faithful, not by virtue of human ingenuity, but by divine grace. There is no “essential vs. non-essential” distinction in apostolic doctrine. All of it is essential, because all of it was handed down for the salvation of man. Fragmentation is the death of unity, and unity is a

mark of the true Church. The Orthodox Church stands as that unity—doctrinal, liturgical, sacramental, historical. All else is confusion. And God is not the author of confusion.

The Church is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. One—because Christ has one Body. Holy—because it is set apart by the presence of God in its sacraments. Catholic—because it is whole and lacks nothing. Apostolic—because its bishops are direct successors of the apostles. These marks are not empty titles—they are realities. And they apply fully and exclusively to the Orthodox Church. Not by our own excellence, but because we have not betrayed what was handed down. That Church is Orthodox. Not by a cultural label, but by fidelity to truth. The Orthodox Church alone holds the keys to the Kingdom because it alone continues in the apostolic faith, apostolic worship, and apostolic authority. It alone has the altar of sacrifice, the real Body and Blood of Christ, the absolution of sins, and the anointing of the sick. It alone can say with truth, “Receive the Body of Christ; taste the fountain of immortality.”

Those outside may have zeal, sincerity, even piety. But zeal without truth cannot save. Sincerity is not a substitute for sacramental grace. Good intentions are not the foundation of the Church. The Ark was not built according to the thoughts of men, but by God's command. And only those inside it were saved. So it is now. The Ark is the ancient Church. Outside it, there is only the flood.

The Sum of Your Word is Truth

From the dawn of creation, mankind has sought after truth. Philosophers have wrestled with it, scientists have attempted to quantify it, and rulers have sought to impose it. Yet, truth is not a construct of human reason, nor is it discovered through earthly wisdom. Truth is not an abstraction but a Person—our Lord Jesus Christ. The Holy Apostle John said: “The Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14) In the Incarnation, truth is no longer veiled. Christ has walked among us, spoken to us, and suffered for our redemption. He is not one among many teachers who speak of truth—He is Truth itself, the eternal Logos who upholds all things.

Long before His coming in the flesh, the prophets bore witness to this reality. The great Isaiah proclaims: “Surely God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid, for the Lord God is my strength and my might; he has become my salvation.” (Isaiah 12:2) The Psalmist echoes this unshakable certainty: “The sum of your word is

truth; and every one of your righteous ordinances endures for ever.” (Psalm 119:160) The truth of God is eternal, unchanging, and unyielding to the shifting sands of human opinion. It is not constructed by man—it is revealed by God. Christ does not conceal Himself from those who seek Him in sincerity. To the Samaritan woman at the well, He reveals the nature of true worship: “God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” (John 4:24) To the man born blind, He unveils His divinity: “You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.” (John 9:37) Those with humble hearts, untainted by pride, receive the light of truth.

Throughout salvation history, God has granted divine illumination to those prepared to receive it. The Prophet Moses beheld the uncreated light upon Mount Sinai but could see only the Lord’s glory from behind. (Ex. 33:22–23) The Apostle Peter, overwhelmed by the radiance of Christ at the Transfiguration, fell upon his face in holy fear. (Matt. 17:6) The righteous elder Simeon, holding the Christ Child in his arms, declared with prophetic joy: “My eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and

for glory to your people Israel.” (Luke 2:30–32) Truth is not grasped by the mind alone but is received by the soul in accordance with its purity. However, not all receive Him. Pontius Pilate, standing before Truth Incarnate, asked, “What is truth?” but turned away without waiting for an answer. The disciples on the road to Emmaus, however, sought more. They implored Him, “Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.” (Luke 24:29) When He broke bread with them, their eyes were opened, and they recognised Him. The truth of Christ is not given in a single moment but is unveiled over time, according to the soul’s capacity to receive it. The Holy Apostle Paul, once a persecutor of the Church, encountered the risen Christ on the road to Damascus and was struck blind. His sight was restored only after days of prayer and fasting, a sign of his inner transformation (Acts 9:8–9, 17–18). The Apostle John, though beloved of Christ, received his fullest revelation in old age when he saw the heavens opened and beheld the glorified Lord (Rev. 1:9–17).

The saints and martyrs of the Church did not seek truth as a worldly pursuit but as a life lived in

union with the living God. Through suffering, obedience, and unceasing prayer, they ascended from glory to glory. The Orthodox faith is not a philosophy, not a theory, but the revelation of the eternal Logos. It is a life of communion with the unchanging Truth, who is Christ our God. May we seek Him with pure hearts, that we too may behold His glory, both in this life and in the age to come.

Prepare Your Soul for Eternity

We will not remain upon this earth. This life is temporary, short, unstable. Every breath you take brings you closer to the grave. You are not guaranteed tomorrow. And if your soul is not prepared, then you will fall into the hands of the living God without defence. You will face your Judge, and all your excuses, comforts, and self-made justifications will be swept away like straw in the fire. A psalm attributed to St. Moses says: “The days of our lives are seventy years; and if by reason of strength they are eighty years, yet their boast is only labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.” (Ps. 90:10*) Do not live as though this world is your home. It is a place of exile. You were cast out of Paradise, and you dwell now in a land of corruption. Why do you pretend otherwise? Look at the cemeteries. Look at the bones of kings and paupers alike. No man escapes death. No one lives here forever. Yet many act as though their future is in this world. They build up their homes, their investments, their comforts, while their souls wither like plants that have not been watered.

Our Lord Himself warns, “What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?” (Mark 8:36) Some people have worked hard their whole lives to gain comforts, entertainment, the respect of others, and the pleasure of their appetites. However, if your soul is corrupted, if you have lived in sin, if you have forsaken the commandments of God, then all your labours will be worthless on the Day of judgement. We must speak plainly. There is a heaven. There is a hell. Our Lord Jesus Christ said: “...The hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.” (John 5:28–29)

You must choose now where you want to spend eternity. Do not say, “I will repent later.” Later may never come. Death does not send a warning. And once you die, your will no longer acts. You will no longer be able to struggle. You will no longer be able to make choices. As you die, so shall you be judged. “And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgement.” (Heb. 9:27) You cannot negotiate with the Judge

on that Day. You cannot say, “I meant well,” or “I had good intentions,” or “I was busy.” Either your life was according to the commandments of Christ, or it was not.

Now let us speak of the flesh. We must crucify our flesh with its desires, or it will drag us to hell. Writing to the Romans, Saint Paul said, “For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.” (Rom. 8:6) What is a carnal mind? A mind obsessed with the body, obsessed with lust, with food, with rest, with pleasure, with distraction. Do you wish to know the signs of a man enslaved to the flesh? He refuses fasting. He refuses prayer. He mocks confession or avoids it. He watches filth with his eyes and pretends it does not damage his soul. He cannot endure silence. He cannot speak of Christ without shame. He prefers to speak of sports, films, and fashion. He hides from his conscience. If we are to be a Christian, then we must imitate Christ. And Christ said, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.” (Matt. 16:24) That is not poetry. It is not a figure of speech. It is a commandment. We must ourselves. That means

our opinions, our impulses, our fleshly desires. Take up your cross. That means suffering. That means endurance. That means death to the world!

Look to the lives of the saints. Did they live comfortable lives? Did they seek popularity? Did they care for possessions and entertainments? No. They fled from the world. They wept for their sins. They endured mockery, sickness, persecution, and death—all for the sake of Christ. Why then do we think we can enter the Kingdom without the same struggle? Some say, “But I go to church.” That is not enough. We must repent. Some say, “I give alms.” That is good, but we must also stop sinning. Some say, “I have faith in my heart.” Then we must show it by our works. After all, “faith, by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.” (James 2:17)

Do not flatter yourself. God is not mocked. Whatever a man sows, that he shall also reap. (Gal. 6:7) If you sow to the flesh, you will reap corruption. If you sow to the Spirit, you will reap eternal life. The Holy Fathers of the ancient faith did not live soft lives. They laboured in prayer, in

fasting, in vigils, in poverty, in exile, and even in death. Why? Because they feared God. They believed in the Day of judgement. They lived every day as if it were their last. You would do well to imitate them.

I ask you—when was the last time you confessed sincerely, without hiding anything? When did you last fast with care? When did you last open the Psalter or the Gospel? When did you last weep for your sins? When did you last pray for your enemies? These are not optional practices. They are necessary.

“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it.” (Matthew 7:13) Look at the world around you. Most people are walking that broad way. They follow their desires. They serve themselves. They mock God. They treat sin as entertainment. They shall not escape damnation. Do not follow them. We must walk the narrow path, even if few walk with us. It is difficult. But the Lord gives grace to those who ask. He strengthens the weak. He forgives the penitent. He receives the humble. But He resists

the proud. He cuts off the lazy. He casts out the lukewarm.

We will die. Perhaps soon. Prepare your soul. Flee from sin. Flee from worldly attachments. Cling to the Cross. Keep the fasts. Keep the feasts. Keep the commandments. And above all, repent—deeply, daily, sincerely. Let no day pass without examining your conscience. Let no night come without prayer. Let no week go by without seeking confession. Now is the time of salvation. “Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.” (2 Cor. 6:2). Not tomorrow. Now. Today. If you prepare your soul in this life, you shall be ready to meet Christ in the next. If you do not, you shall perish. That is the truth. That is the warning. And it is out of love that I speak it to you—not with sweet words, but with clarity.

May the Lord give you the fear of God. May He strengthen you to walk in repentance. And may you, by His mercy, be found worthy to stand at His right hand on the Last Day.

Homily on Romans 5:12-15

“Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned — sin was indeed in the world before the law, but sin is not reckoned when there is no law. Yet death exercised dominion from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who is a type of the one who was to come. But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died through the one man’s trespass, much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many.” (Rom. 5:12-15)

Today I wanted to briefly speak upon the words of the Apostle St. Paul in his letter to the Romans, a passage that reveals both the depth of human sin and the boundless grace of God. St. Paul speaks to us of two men—Adam and Christ—each representing two realities, two destinies. In Adam, we see the fall, the entrance of sin, and the consequence of death. In Christ, we see

redemption, the outpouring of divine grace, and the promise of eternal life.

Let us consider first what St. Paul says about Adam: “Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned.” Here, the Apostle does not merely recount history but reveals a fundamental truth about our condition. Adam’s disobedience, his turning away from God, introduced corruption into the world. He chose self-will over obedience, and in that moment, he severed himself from the divine life. Sin entered, and with it, death—the great wound of our nature. This death was not only physical but spiritual. The image of God in man was marred. We inherited not the guilt of Adam’s sin, but its consequences—our nature became subject to corruption, to weakness, to the tyranny of the passions. Death, St. Paul tells us, “exercised dominion from Adam to Moses,” meaning that from the beginning, all humanity suffered under its shadow. Even before the giving of the Law to Israel, mankind was already subject to the wages of sin, for the knowledge of good

and evil was within them, yet their hearts inclined toward darkness.

The account does not end there! St. Paul does not speak of Adam's sin merely to remind us of our fallen condition but to direct us to the One who brings salvation: our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. He wrote: "But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died through the one man's trespass, much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many."

What does this mean? It means that the grace of Christ does not solely undo the fall—it surpasses it! Adam's sin brought corruption, but Christ's obedience brings life. Adam's act severed our communion with God, but Christ, through His incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection, restores and perfects it. The first man, made from the dust, brought us into exile; the New Man, the God-Man, has brought us back home. This is why St. Paul calls Adam a "type of the one who was to come." Adam foreshadowed Christ, but where Adam fell, Christ stood firm. Where Adam was conquered by sin, Christ conquered sin itself.

This, my dear faithful, is the heart of our salvation. Christ, taking on our nature, unites it once more to God. By His death, He destroys death. By His resurrection, He opens the path to life. In Adam, we were bound to corruption, but in Christ, we are set free. This is not of our own doing. It is not our works, our merit, or our strength that redeems us. It is, as St. Paul says, the “free gift”—the grace of God poured out abundantly through Jesus Christ.

However, though the grace of Christ is given freely, it does not work in us without our cooperation. The question before us is: Will we live as children of the first Adam, ruled by the passions, enslaved to sin, captive to death? Or will we live as members of the New Adam, clothed in Christ, transformed by His grace, partaking of His divine life? We enter into this grace through Holy Baptism, where we are buried with Christ and rise anew. We are nourished by it in the Holy Eucharist, where we partake of His very Body and Blood. We are restored to it through repentance and Confession, where the shackles of sin are broken, and we are cleansed anew. This is the life

Christ offers us—a life no longer dominated by sin and death, but filled with the grace of God.

May we, therefore, brethren, cling to Christ with all our hearts. Let us turn away from sin, from all that is of the old Adam, and embrace the new life given to us in Christ. Let us live as heirs of the promise, bearing the fruits of righteousness, striving always toward holiness. And may we never cease to give thanks for this free gift of grace, greater than the trespass, given to us not because we deserve it, but because our God is merciful and loves mankind.

To Him be glory, honour, and worship, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

True Peace in Christ

In a world filled with turmoil, our Lord's words resound with eternal truth: "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28) This is no passing comfort, no fleeting relief offered by the world, but a divine rest—a peace that flows from Christ Himself, the only true source of stillness for the soul. The peace that the world gives is shallow and quickly passing, built upon external circumstances, but the peace of Christ is unshakable, rooted in the depths of the heart, beyond the reach of worldly troubles. "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives." (John 14:27) This peace is the fruit of communion with God, a grace bestowed upon those who entrust their lives to Him.

To rest in Christ is to surrender our burdens into His hands, with faith that He alone upholds us. The Apostle St. Peter exhorts us: "Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you." (1 Peter 5:7) This is not a passive resignation but an active trust, a conscious placing of our cares before the

Lord, knowing that He is our refuge. The Psalmist instructs us, “Be still before the Lord, and wait patiently for him.” (Psalm 37:7) In this stillness, the Orthodox Christian finds peace—not in escaping suffering, but in uniting suffering with Christ, who bore our sorrows upon the Cross. The world teaches that peace comes through the avoidance of hardship, through distractions, comforts, or fleeting pleasures. But the peace of Christ is found even in suffering. The Holy Fathers teach that suffering endured with Christ is transformed into the very means of sanctification. As St. Paul writes, “The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:7) This is a peace that does not waver in the face of trials, for it is not dependent upon the world, but upon the presence of Christ Himself within the soul.

The hesychasts of the Orthodox tradition teach that true peace is found in hesychia, sacred stillness before God. It is in this silence of the heart that we encounter the Lord. In prayer, in the Divine Liturgy, in the mystery of the Holy Eucharist, the soul is nourished by Christ’s peace. But to receive this peace, we must withdraw from

the noise of the world. The world is restless, tossed about by passions, by anxieties, by the distractions of the enemy. But the Christian who abides in Christ stands upon the rock of faith, unmoved by the tempests of life.

Even death itself cannot shake the one who has found true peace in Christ, for nothing can separate us from His love: “For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Rom. 8:38-39) The saints and martyrs did not fear suffering or death, for their peace was not of this world—it was the peace of the Kingdom of God, already present in their souls.

May we flee to Christ, seeking the peace that only He can give. Let us reclaim the sacred silence where God speaks, the quiet of the heart where His grace abides. The words of St. Augustine ring true: “Thou hast made us for Thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in Thee.” May we cease our restless striving after the illusions of

peace offered by the world, and instead, enter into the stillness of Christ. For only in Him do we find a peace that is unshaken, eternal, and life-giving—the peace of the Kingdom that endures unto the ages of ages.

Taste and See that the Lord is Good

“O taste and see that the Lord is good; happy are those who take refuge in Him.” (Psalm 34:8)

Not only is the thirty-fourth Psalm a poetic expression of thanksgiving, it is also a song of deliverance, a testimony to the Lord’s unwavering providence, and a summons to place all trust in Him. It is a psalm that arises from personal tribulation, penned by David at a moment of grave peril. The historical setting is found in 1 Samuel 21, where David, fleeing from Saul’s relentless pursuit, sought refuge among the Philistines in the court of Abimelech, also known as Achish. Finding himself in imminent danger, he feigned madness to escape the threat, and he was delivered. Yet, David did not attribute his survival to his own ingenuity or deception. Rather, he recognised that it was by the hand of God that he had been spared. His response was not self-congratulation but praise; his experience of divine rescue became a lesson for all generations, a call to unwavering trust in the living God.

David begins the psalm with a declaration of

continuous worship: “I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth.” (Psalm 34:1). These are not the words of a man who only praises when circumstances are favourable, but of one who has learned that true worship transcends the momentary conditions of life. To bless the Lord at all times means to acknowledge His sovereignty in both joy and sorrow, in safety and in distress. Many are quick to glorify God when He grants prosperity, yet the psalmist insists that even in tribulation, the name of the Lord must be extolled. Such is the mark of the one who truly knows God—not a once a week reverence, but a constant disposition of the heart.

David then proclaims, “My soul makes its boast in the Lord; let the humble hear and be glad.” (Psalm 34:2) The world boasts in wealth, in power, in wisdom, but the righteous boast in the Lord alone. The soul that has encountered the goodness of God can do no other than proclaim it, not for self-aggrandisement, but that others might also hear and rejoice. He then calls upon the faithful: “O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together.” (Psalm 34:3) Worship is not only a private act; it is communal. The

Church gathers to lift its voice in praise, knowing that the Lord is enthroned upon the praises of His people (cf. Psalm 22:3).

David speaks from experience when he proclaims, “I sought the Lord, and He answered me, and delivered me from all my fears.” (Psalm 34:4) This is not an abstract theological principle but a concrete reality. The Lord hears His children; the Lord does not turn away from those who cry out to Him. The world is fraught with uncertainty, with adversities that seem insurmountable, yet St. David testifies that those who seek the Lord find deliverance—not always from suffering itself, but from the despair that suffering seeks to impose. Those who trust in Him will never be abandoned, for He is faithful to His own.

In the fifth verse, we find radiant joy: “Look to Him, and be radiant; so your faces shall never be ashamed.” (Psalm 34:5) Those who place their confidence in God reflect His light. The righteous are not merely sustained; they shine with the radiance of divine favour. This brightness is not the consequence of worldly success, but of a soul

illuminated by grace. The countenance of the faithful is uplifted, because they stand in the presence of the Almighty.

David then provides further testimony: “This poor soul cried, and was heard by the Lord, and was saved from every trouble.” (Psalm 34:6) He does not claim strength of his own; he acknowledges his poverty, his absolute dependence upon God. True faith does not rely on human capability, but on divine sufficiency. The psalmist declares a wondrous truth: “The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him, and delivers them.” (Psalm 34:7). Those who fear the Lord are never alone; divine protection surrounds them. The angelic host stands as a bulwark against unseen enemies, shielding the faithful from the assaults of the evil one.

Then comes the great invitation: “O taste and see that the Lord is good; happy are those who take refuge in Him.” (Psalm 34:8) This is not a call to mere intellectual assent, as if one could comprehend the Lord’s goodness through reason alone. It is an invitation to experience Him—to partake of His goodness as one partakes of a

meal, nourishing the soul as food nourishes the body. Faith is not an abstract philosophy or a distant theory; it is a lived encounter with the living God.

To “taste” is to engage personally and deeply, to take in the reality of God’s presence and find it satisfying. To “see” is to perceive with clarity, to recognise His hand at work in one’s life. These are not passive actions but deliberate choices. One does not stumble into the experience of God’s goodness by accident; one must seek Him, open one’s heart, and take refuge in Him. It is in the crucible of trials that this invitation becomes most urgent and its promise most real. When afflictions press upon the soul, when darkness closes in, it is then that the sweetness of the Lord’s presence is most vividly known. The world offers no refuge that endures, no solace that truly satisfies. But those who take shelter in the Lord find themselves upheld, strengthened, and consoled. The saints and martyrs did not merely believe in the goodness of God; they tasted it in the midst of their sufferings. They saw it in the fires of persecution, in the loneliness of exile, and in the agonies of martyrdom.

Thus, St. David does not speak to the detached observer, but to the one willing to enter fully into the life of faith. The call is clear: Do not stand at a distance. Do not settle for second-hand knowledge of God's goodness. Come, taste, and see. Take refuge in Him, and you will know a happiness the world cannot give nor take away.

The psalm then exhorts the faithful to fear the Lord, for "those who fear Him have no want." (Psalm 34:9) It is not the powerful who are truly secure, nor the rich who are truly provided for, but those who fear the Lord. The psalmist contrasts them with the worldly: "The young lions suffer want and hunger, but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing." (Psalm 34:10) Even the strongest among men, symbolised by the lions, find themselves in need, but the faithful are sustained by the hand of God.

The call to righteousness follows: "Come, O children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord." (Psalm 34:11) This fear is not terror, but reverence—the posture of a heart rightly oriented toward God. It manifests in moral conduct, as the psalmist instructs: "Keep your tongue from evil,

and your lips from speaking deceit. Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it.” (Psalm 34:13-14)

True reverence for God is not confined to words or outward displays of piety; it is revealed in the substance of one’s life. The righteous are known not merely by what they profess, but by what they do. They walk in integrity, speak truth without compromise, reject deceit in all its forms, and actively pursue peace—not as a passive state, but as a task requiring effort, humility, and sacrifice. Their lives reflect the holiness of the One they serve, for reverence without righteousness is empty, and faith without works is dead. The Lord’s favour rests upon such people. His watchful eyes are upon them as a loving Father who sees, knows, and cares. He is never far away. His ears are open to their cries, for the righteous do not trust in their own strength but call upon Him in times of trouble. They are not exempt from suffering, but they are never abandoned. “Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord rescues them from them all.” (Psalm 34:19) He is their refuge, their deliverer, their vindicator.

However, against the wicked His face is set. The Bible is clear: “The face of the Lord is against evildoers, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.” (Psalm 34:16) The contrast is stark—while the righteous are watched over and heard, the wicked are cast away, their legacy erased. Those who persist in deceit, who sow discord rather than peace, who trample on truth and mock righteousness, will not stand in the presence of God. Their deeds will not endure; their names will not be honoured. The world may exalt them for a time, but the Lord Himself will bring them to nothing.

This is a sobering truth. The fear of the Lord is not sentimental, nor is it a mere emotion. It demands righteousness, for God is not indifferent to sin. To revere Him is to live in obedience to Him, and to reject Him is to face His judgement. David does not present a vague spirituality but a clear moral order—those who walk in the ways of the Lord will be upheld, but those who defy Him will be brought low. Let every soul take heed, for the eyes of the Lord are watching, and His judgement is sure.

David then assures us that the Lord is near to the broken-hearted and saves those crushed in spirit (Psalm 34:18) Suffering is not the end of the righteous; the Lord delivers them, though “many are the afflictions of the righteous.” (Psalm 34:19) Here, we see a foreshadowing of Christ, the Righteous One, whose suffering was redemptive. The psalm is fulfilled in Him: “He watches over all His bones; not one of them shall be broken.” (Psalm 34:20; cf. John 19:36)

The psalm concludes with a great assurance: “The Lord redeems the life of His servants; none who take refuge in Him will be condemned.” (Psalm 34:22) This is the heart of the Gospel. Those who trust in Christ, the true Refuge, will never be abandoned. The world will continue to rage, but the Lord is their deliverance. Let us then take refuge in Him, taste and see His goodness, and lift our voices in eternal praise, for He is the God who saves.

Encouraging One Another in the Faith

The world is filled with confusion, despair, and spiritual weakness. Christians must stand firm and strengthen one another in faith. Encouragement is not optional; it is a command. The Apostle Paul instructs: “Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.” (1 Thessalonians 5:11) This is an obligation, not a suggestion. A Christian who purposely isolates himself from his brethren can become vulnerable to deception. The Church is a fortress, and its members must support each other in the battle for salvation.

The home is the first battleground because it is where the soul is first formed, where virtues are cultivated or neglected, and where faith either takes root or withers. The world is constantly waging war against holiness, thus parents must not only protect their children but arm them with spiritual strength. This begins with an unshakable commitment to the faith—an environment where Christ is not an afterthought but the very centre of daily life. Parents must train their children not through mere words but by example. Children

learn to love the faith by witnessing their parents live it. If parents are indifferent, the child will be too. Regular Bible reading and study must be more than a formality; it must be a true encounter with God's word. The lives of the saints should be studied, not as distant stories but as blueprints for Christian living. The divine services must not be optional or burdensome but the heart of the family's life, where they meet Christ in the sacraments and unite with the Holy Church.

A home without prayer is defenceless against the evils of the world. It is not a question of whether the world will influence a household but how prepared the household is to resist it. If the family does not pray together, then secular ideologies, distractions, and sin will flood the home unchallenged. The father, as head of the household, must be its spiritual leader, not through tyranny but through loving sacrifice. He must strengthen his wife in faith, encouraging her in prayer and virtue. Likewise, a wife must remind her husband of their shared path to salvation, ensuring that their marriage remains anchored in Christ. Marriage is not about comfort; it is about bearing the Cross together. The modern world

presents marriage as a source of personal happiness, but in truth, it is a lifelong struggle towards holiness. Spouses must support one another in repentance, confessing their sins, forgiving each other, and striving toward greater love. St. John Chrysostom warns that a home divided by worldly distractions will not stand—if a family prioritises wealth, entertainment, or status over Christ, their foundation will crumble.

The family must live in repentance. Parents must teach their children to seek Christ in all things, to humble themselves, and to fight against sin. There is no neutral ground—either a family is drawing closer to God, or it is drifting away. Every home must become a domestic church, a place of constant spiritual warfare and unwavering faith, where each member strengthens the other in love and devotion to God.

The parish is not a place for idle chatter or empty gatherings. It is the house of God, where the faithful come to worship, repent, and be nourished by the Holy Mysteries. Every member of the Church bears a responsibility for his brethren. The Christian life is not an isolated

journey but a shared struggle. Those who enter the parish must not be left to fend for themselves. Widows, often left vulnerable and alone, must be supported with love and material care, as St. James wrote: “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.” (James 1:27)

Converts must not be abandoned after baptism, left to navigate the spiritual life without guidance. They are newborns in the faith, needing instruction, encouragement, and steadfast companionship. Without this, many will falter, confused by the pressures of the world or discouraged by spiritual struggles. Likewise, the elderly, disabled and home-bound must not be set aside as if they have nothing left to offer. The elderly carry the wisdom of years, their prayers sustaining the Church even when they can no longer labour as they once did. St. Paul commands: “Bear one another’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ.” (Galatians 6:2) Neglect is inexcusable. The Church is not a gathering of strangers but a single body. If one member suffers, all suffer. If one

stumbles, the others must uphold him. Indifference is a betrayal of the Christian calling.

The fallen must be restored. Many souls leave the Church, convinced that their sins are too great to be forgiven. They are deceived. Christ Himself assures us: "I have come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance." (Luke 5:32) The Prodigal Son was not cast away, but received with open arms. The Christian has no right to abandon those who have strayed. He must seek them out, remind them of the mercy of God, and bring them back to the Holy Mysteries. St. Isaac the Syrian said: "Spread your cloak over those who fall into sin, each and every one, and shield them. And if you cannot take the fault on yourself and accept punishment in their place, do not destroy their character." To turn away from the lost is to defy Christ Himself. The Church is not a fortress for the self-satisfied but a hospital for sinners, where no soul is beyond redemption.

Prayer is not secondary to encouragement; it is its foundation. Words alone do not change hearts. If a Christian speaks without first interceding, his words lack power. Encouragement without prayer

is no more than human effort, unable to touch the soul. St. James tells us: “The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective.” (James 5:16) If we desire to strengthen our brethren, we must first bring them before God. The saints did not rely on mere words to support those who struggled. They prayed with tears, fasted with discipline, and endured suffering for the salvation of others. St. Silouan the Athonite wept for the whole world¹, not because he was sentimental, but because he understood that love demands sacrifice. St. Paul did not simply exhort the faithful; he laboured in prayer for them, writing: “I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings should be made for everyone.” (1 Timothy 2:1) We cannot expect to strengthen others if we do not first offer them to Christ.

True encouragement is not sentimentality or mere comfort. It is an act of spiritual warfare. The devil seeks to isolate, discourage, and destroy souls. When we intercede for others, we stand against this attack, calling down grace upon those in need. To encourage someone without prayer is to send him into battle unarmed. We must carry the burdens of others before God, pleading for

their healing, their strength, and their salvation. Without this, our words are empty, and our encouragement is of no real use.

As Christians, we must live as encouragers, not out of preference, but out of obligation. Encouragement is not reserved for moments of crisis; it is a constant duty, woven into the fabric of daily life. The spiritual battle never ceases, and neither should the work of strengthening one's brethren. Just as the body needs daily nourishment, so too does the soul require continual support from fellow believers. A Christian who does not encourage his brethren neglects his role within the Church, failing in both love and responsibility.

In the Divine Liturgy, the faithful stand together before God, not as isolated individuals, but as one body, united in prayer and repentance. This unity must not end when the service concludes. The Church is not confined to the walls of a building; it extends into every aspect of life—home, business, work and school. If believers stand together before God in worship, they must also stand together in the struggles of daily life. To

abandon a brother to his burdens, to ignore his sorrows or his temptations, is to betray the very essence of Christian fellowship.

The Apostle Paul commands: “And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” (Hebrews 10:24-25) The Day of judgement draws near, and the Christian cannot afford to be complacent. Every moment of delay is a lost opportunity to strengthen a wavering soul, to correct a brother in danger, or to call a sinner to repentance. The time given to each person is brief, and what is left must be spent in the service of salvation—one’s own and that of others.

Encouragement is not flattery, nor is it passive affirmation. It involves correction when necessary, guiding others back to the path of righteousness. It demands wisdom, courage, and love. A Christian who comforts his brethren without leading them towards holiness offers nothing of true value. Encouragement that does not bring a soul closer to Christ is empty.

Anything less than the earnest effort to strengthen others in faith, virtue, and repentance is failure. To live otherwise is to neglect the weight of one's calling.

My brethren, the Christian life is a constant struggle, not only for personal salvation but for the strengthening of others in the faith. No one can walk this path alone. The Church is not a collection of individuals but a single body, bound together by Christ. To encourage one another is not a choice; it is a command. To neglect a struggling brother is to fail in love. Encouragement must be rooted in truth, not empty words or worldly comfort. It must be founded on prayer, directed towards repentance, and aimed at salvation. The day of the Lord is approaching, and every moment must be used to build up the Church, restore the fallen, and carry one another towards the Kingdom of God.

The Power of Forgiveness

Forgiveness is not only an ethical obligation or a personal virtue; it is a deeply significant reality at the heart of the Orthodox Christian life. It is through forgiveness that we participate in the very life of Christ, who “came to seek out and to save the lost.” (Luke 19:10) In the prayer our Lord taught us, we beseech, “And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.” (Matt. 6:12) This is not a meagre request but a spiritual law: the measure of our own forgiveness by God is tied to our willingness to forgive others. If we refuse to forgive, we place ourselves outside of God’s mercy, as Christ warns: “If you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” (Matt. 6:15)

Throughout His earthly life, Christ embodied divine forgiveness. He forgave the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11), not excusing her sin but restoring her to the path of righteousness. He healed the paralytic by first granting him forgiveness (Mark 2:5), revealing that true healing is found in reconciliation with God. And in His greatest act of love, as He hung upon the Cross,

He prayed for those who crucified Him: “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). If the Lord Himself, the sinless One, forgave even those who tortured and killed Him, how much more are we, who are sinners, called to forgive?

Forgiveness is not a one-time event but an ongoing struggle. When Peter asked Christ how often he must forgive, our Lord responded, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven” (Matt. 18:22). This is not a numerical limit but a commandment concerning unceasing mercy. True forgiveness is not simply forgetting wrongs but actively choosing love over resentment, prayer over bitterness, humility over pride. If we cling to anger, we allow the devil to take root in our hearts, poisoning us with hatred. The Church Fathers teach that unforgiveness is like drinking poison and expecting another to die; it darkens the soul and separates us from the light of Christ.

The parable of the unforgiving servant (Matt. 18:23-35) is a dire warning. The servant, forgiven an immeasurable debt, refused to extend that

same mercy to another. In his hardness of heart, he lost the mercy he had received. This means that our forgiveness from God is conditional upon our willingness to forgive others. We cannot stand before the Chalice and pray for mercy if we harbour hatred against our brother. As St. John Chrysostom writes, “Nothing makes us so like God as our readiness to forgive.”

Forgiveness is not weakness; it is a weapon against the devil. The demons delight in division, in grudges, in estrangement. But when we forgive, we tear down their strongholds and restore peace to our souls. It is through forgiveness that we enter into the joy of the Resurrection, for unforgiveness is the burden of the old man, while the new man in Christ is free. St. Silouan the Athonite taught, “The soul that has not known the Holy Spirit does not understand how one can love one’s enemies.”

In the Orthodox Church, we mark the beginning of Great Lent with Forgiveness Sunday, when the faithful ask and offer forgiveness to one another. This is not a paltry formality but a recognition that the path to Pascha requires a heart

unburdened by resentment. As we prepare to stand before Christ, we must first be reconciled with one another, lest we approach Him in hypocrisy. Forgiveness is the path of Christ. It is the medicine for the soul, the balm that heals wounds, and the bridge that unites us to God and each other. As St. Paul exhorts, “Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you” (Eph. 4:32). To forgive is to stand in the light of divine love, to reflect the mercy of our Lord, and to walk the road of salvation.

May each of us forgive one another, that we may be forgiven. Let us cast aside the burden of hatred and embrace the freedom of Christ’s mercy. For only in forgiveness do we truly live as sons and daughters of the Heavenly Father, awaiting the final victory of love over sin and death.

Resting in Christ's Presence

“Come to me, all you who labour and have been burdened, and I will refresh you.” – Matthew 11:28

Christ's invitation is not a vague offer of comfort but a profound reality for those who truly seek Him. In our struggles, we often turn to our own strength, relying on our willpower, routines, or external solutions to manage life's burdens. Yet Christ does not say, “Endure alone,” or “Find your own way.” He commands us to come to Him. This is an act of faith, a conscious movement toward the One who alone can provide true refreshment. The Orthodox Christian life is not about self-sufficiency but about surrendering to divine grace.

The world constantly demands more of us, filling our minds with worries, anxieties, and endless distractions. Even within the Church, we can fall into the temptation of busyness—labouring for Christ without actually resting in Him. The story of Martha and Mary in Luke's Gospel is not a rebuke of service but a revelation of priority.

Christ tells Martha, “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled over many things. And yet only one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the best portion, and it shall not be taken away from her.” (Luke 10:41-42) The “one thing necessary” is Christ Himself. If our labours do not flow from a heart resting in Him, they become mere toil rather than spiritual fruitfulness.

To rest in Christ is not to embrace passivity but to enter into the stillness where God speaks. This stillness is not mere silence but an interior disposition, a heart receptive to divine grace. In a world consumed with noise and distraction, cultivating this sacred stillness requires effort. It is not idleness but a spiritual discipline, a watchfulness over the soul. The Holy Church, in her wisdom, has provided many means for this: prayerful silence, hesychia, the Jesus Prayer, and, above all, participation in the Holy Mysteries.

Hesychia, for example, is the sacred stillness of the heart, is a discipline known to the saints and ascetics of the Church. It is not an escape from reality but a deeper engagement with it through communion with Christ. The Jesus Prayer—“Lord

Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner”—is a simple yet significantly profound means of entering into this blessed stillness. When prayed with attention and humility, it quiets the mind, subdues the passions, and draws the soul into the presence of God. It is not a formula but a way of life, a ceaseless remembrance of Christ that transforms the heart. Above all, the Divine Liturgy is the wellspring of true spiritual rest. It is here that we step out of the cares of the world and into the foretaste of the Kingdom. Every petition in the Liturgy calls us to lay aside earthly concerns and focus entirely on Christ. When we receive the Holy Eucharist, we partake of the Bread of Life, the very source of our renewal. This is not a quick-passing rest but a deep restoration of the soul, for Christ Himself comes to dwell within us. Without the Eucharist, our spiritual strength wanes; with it, we are sustained in the journey toward salvation.

Yet, rest in Christ is not confined to the walls of the Church. It must extend into our daily lives. This means consciously stepping away from the distractions that pull us away from God. It requires setting aside time for silence, for prayer,

for simply abiding in His presence. The saints teach us that even amidst the demands of life, we can cultivate an interior stillness, an unceasing awareness of Christ. This is the true peace that the world cannot give. “The intellect cannot be still unless the body is still also; and the wall between them cannot be demolished without stillness and prayer.” (St Mark the Ascetic). At the heart of this rest is trust. Our anxieties or fears often stem from a failure to surrender to God’s will. We grasp for control, fearing the unknown, forgetting that our lives are in His hands. But the Bible commands us, “Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you.” (1 Peter 5:7) True rest is not found in the absence of trials but in the certainty that Christ holds all things. The saints knew this well. Though they suffered, they did not despair, for their souls were anchored in Jesus Christ. Their peace was not dependent on circumstances but on their unwavering trust in God.

If we wish to enter into this rest, we must make a choice—to quiet our hearts, to seek Christ above all things, and to trust in His providence. The world will always demand more, but we are not

called to live by its restless rhythm. We are called to abide in the peace of Christ, to rest in Him, and to find in Him the renewal of our souls.

As we journey through the Church's seasons, whether in Advent, Great Lent, or the quiet of ordinary days, let us remember Christ's call to rest in Him. The world will never cease its demands, but we are not meant to live in its restless rhythm. We are called to the peace of Christ, the peace that surpasses all understanding, a peace that begins when we take Him at His word and lay our burdens at His feet.

Our Inheritance in the Lord

“And if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.” — Romans 8:17

The Apostle Paul, in his epistle to the Romans, reveals the great mystery of our adoption as children of God. To be an heir of God is to receive an inheritance not of fleeting earthly riches but of eternal communion with Him. This inheritance is given to us through Christ, in whom we are made partakers of the divine life. It is not an abstract promise; it is the very reality of our salvation, accomplished through the Incarnation, Cross, and Resurrection of our Lord.

From the beginning, God has prepared this inheritance for those who love Him. In the Old Covenant, the tribes of Israel received their inheritance in the land, but the Levites were given something greater: the Lord Himself as their portion. This foreshadowed the New Covenant, in which the faithful are called to inherit not merely the things of this world but

God Himself. The Kingdom of Heaven is not a place of material splendour; it is the unending life of divine grace, where the righteous behold the face of God and dwell in His glory forever.

Through Christ, we are made joint heirs, sharing in His divine inheritance. He is not only our Redeemer but our elder Brother, who has opened the way to the Father. The inheritance of the Son becomes our inheritance, not by right, but by grace. Theosis, the transformation of the human person into the likeness of God, is the ultimate fulfilment of this inheritance. It is the purpose for which we were created, the destiny for which Christ came into the world. Yet, this inheritance is inseparable from the Cross. Saint Paul teaches us that to share in Christ's glory, we must also share in His sufferings. The path to the Kingdom is the path of the Cross, for it is through suffering that we are purified and made ready to receive the fullness of divine life. As the Lord Himself said, "Whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me" (Matthew 10:38). Suffering is not an obstacle to our inheritance but the very means by which we are conformed to Christ. It is in bearing our trials with patience and

faith that we enter into the mystery of His redemptive love.

The Christian life is one of pilgrimage, a journey towards the heavenly inheritance that has been prepared for us. The trials of this world remind us not to set our hearts on transient things but to lift our eyes to that which is eternal. “Let your eyes look directly forward, and your gaze be straight before you. Keep straight the path of your feet, and all your ways will be sure” (Proverbs 4:25-26). The saints who have gone before us bore witness to this truth, enduring suffering with joy because they knew their true home was not of this world.

To live as heirs of God is to embody the virtues of faith, hope, and love. It is to renounce the passing pleasures of this world and seek first the Kingdom of Heaven. “Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth” (Colossians 3:2). The Church, through the Holy Mysteries, sustains us in this journey. In the Divine Liturgy, we are given a foretaste of our inheritance, receiving the very Body and Blood of Christ, who is the Bread of Life. Through prayer, fasting, and the ascetic life, we grow in our

likeness to Christ and prepare ourselves for the joy of the Kingdom.

This inheritance is certain, for it is secured by the promise of God. No earthly trial, no suffering, no power of darkness can take it from us. “For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” (Romans 11:29). Therefore, let us walk in faith, bearing our crosses with patience, and fixing our hope on that which is to come. “The Lord is my portion; I promise to keep your words” (Psalm 119:57). May we, as His children, persevere in this hope, knowing that our true home is with Him, in the unending light of His glory.

A Season of Anticipation and Grace

The Nativity Fast, or Advent, is not merely a season of waiting but a time of spiritual renewal, calling the faithful to prepare their souls for the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. In a world that rushes to celebrate Christmas with excess and distraction, the Holy Church bids her children to step away from the noise and turn inward, seeking the true light that is Christ. This season is not one of idle anticipation but of active preparation, where fasting disciplines the body, prayer lifts the soul, and repentance purifies the heart. The joy of Advent is not superficial nor rooted in sentimentality. It is the deep and abiding joy that springs from the promises of God, who has never abandoned His people. The prophet Isaiah proclaims: “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness—on them light has shined.” (Isaiah 9:2) This is the promise given to people burdened by sin and despair, a declaration of divine faithfulness that echoes through the centuries. The coming of Christ, the Light of the World, is the fulfilment of that promise, stirring in us a longing that is both joyous and penitential.

As the fast progresses, the faithful are called to cultivate stillness, to allow the expectation of Christ's coming to transform them. The world's hurried celebrations fade in significance compared to the profound mystery of the Incarnation—God becoming man to redeem His creation. This is why the Church does not rush but rather moves with deliberate reverence, guiding her children through a season of preparation so that, when the feast of the Nativity arrives, their hearts may receive Christ with true and abiding joy.

The Nativity Fast is a sacred reminder that the Lord's promises are not fulfilled according to human reckoning but in the fullness of His divine wisdom. The unfolding of salvation is not dictated by earthly impatience or expectation but by the providence of God, who acts at the appointed time. St. Paul spoke about then when he wrote, "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children." (Galatians 4:4-5) The Incarnation was not a haphazard event, nor did it come at a

moment of human choosing; rather, it was the culmination of God's eternal plan, executed with perfect precision.

This sublime truth calls us to deeper trust in the Lord's timing. Just as generations of the righteous longed for the Messiah and were not disappointed, so too must we learn to wait with faith, knowing that God fulfils His promises when the time is right. Advent is a time of holy expectation, not just for the Nativity, but for the ongoing work of Christ in our own lives. Each passing day of this fast strengthens our anticipation, urging us to surrender our anxieties, impatience, and uncertainties, and instead embrace the mystery of divine providence.

To prepare for the coming of Christ is to prepare our hearts to receive Him as He comes—both in the humility of Bethlehem and in the fullness of His second coming. The waiting of Advent is a call to readiness, an invitation to deepen our prayer, increase our repentance, and fix our hope more firmly on the Lord. The gift of His presence is not one we grasp through our own efforts but

one we receive in stillness, faith, and unwavering trust in His perfect will.

The Nativity Fast carries with it a dual character—penitence and joyful expectation. It is a time of preparation, calling the faithful to self-examination, repentance, and spiritual vigilance. Yet, unlike the heavy sorrow of Great Lent, Advent's penitence is suffused with hope. The Church does not fast in mourning but in anticipation, knowing that the dawn of salvation is near. St. Paul's exhortation, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice." (Philippians 4:4) This is a command rooted in the reality of Christ's coming. The joy of Advent is not dependent on worldly circumstances but on the unshakable promise of redemption. Let us also bear in mind that this joy is not superficial or fleeting, nor does it contradict the call to repentance. Rather, it springs from the nearness of Christ, who comes to save, to heal, and to restore. Just as a weary traveller rejoices at the sight of home on the horizon, so too does the Holy Church rejoice, even in the midst of penance, because the Redeemer draws near. The examination of conscience, the offering of prayer,

and the ascetic discipline of fasting are not burdens but preparations for the great feast to come.

Above all, Advent's joy is rooted in the certainty of God's mercy. Even as we confront our sins and weaknesses, we do so with confidence, knowing that our Lord Jesus Christ does not delay in His compassion. The very purpose of His coming is to lift the burden of sin and bring light into the darkness. Thus, the penitential aspect of Advent does not cast a shadow over its joy but refines it, leading the faithful to greet the Nativity with hearts made pure and ready to receive the King who humbles Himself to be born among us.

The Theotokos, the exemplar of Advent joy, teaches us how to respond to the coming of Christ. Her Magnificat, proclaimed during her visitation to St. Elizabeth, is a hymn of gratitude and joy: "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name." (Luke

1:46-49) The Blessed Mother's song reminds us that true joy is found in recognising the mighty works of God and trusting in His mercy.

This season is an opportunity to prepare ourselves spiritually, to cast away the works of darkness, and to adorn our souls with virtues befitting the King of kings. The joy of Advent is the serious recognition that God Himself has entered into human history to save us. In this holy season, let us not be swept away by the distractions of the world and the commercialisation of Christmas. Instead, may we embrace the joys of Advent: the joy of hope, the joy of preparation, and the joy of the promise fulfilled in Christ. With hearts made ready, we will greet the Saviour with the same faith and joy as the shepherds and wise men, singing with the angels, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased!"

Divine Love and Fidelity

The words of Christ in the tenth chapter of the Gospel According to St. Mark is a strong affirmation of the sacredness and permanence of marriage. In a world where human weakness seeks to redefine or diminish the divine order, Jesus Christ speaks with absolute clarity, reaffirming that marriage is not a trivial human contract subject to revision, but a holy and indissoluble covenant established by Almighty God Himself. His response to the Pharisees, who sought to test Him regarding divorce, is not only a rejection of their legalistic mindset but a call to return to the original divine plan for marriage—a plan that transcends human laws, societal customs, and personal desires.

The Pharisees approach Jesus with a question designed to ensnare Him: “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” (Mark 10:2) Their intent is not genuine inquiry, but entrapment. If Jesus were to outright deny the legitimacy of divorce, He would appear to contradict Mosaic law, which permitted it under certain conditions. If He were to affirm it, He would undermine His own teaching on the

divine nature of marriage. But Christ, with divine wisdom, does not engage in their legalistic debate. Instead, He redirects the discussion to a higher truth—the will of God as revealed from the beginning. Moses allowed divorce “because of your hardness of heart” (Mark 10:5), but this was never God’s original intention. It was a concession, not a commandment; a response to human frailty, not a reflection of divine will. Christ makes this abundantly clear when He recalls the words of Genesis: “From the beginning of the creation, God made them male and female. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh; so then they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.” (Mark 10:6-9, OSB)

Here, Christ proclaims that marriage is not a human arrangement that can be dissolved at will. It is a sacred union, established by God Himself, and no human authority has the power to sever it. He restores marriage to its original dignity, stripping away the legalistic allowances that had

crept in through human weakness and reaffirming that marriage is a lifelong, unbreakable bond.

Christ's teaching might seem radical to the world. The idea that marriage is irrevocable, that it is not subject to human whim or changing societal norms, directly opposes the worldly attitude that views marriage as conditional, based on convenience or emotional satisfaction. Marriage is not a temporary contract—it is a covenant, a sacred commitment that mirrors God's unwavering fidelity to His people.

Christ's words regarding remarriage after divorce are equally uncompromising: "So He said to them, 'Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her. And if a woman divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.'" (Mark 10:11-12) These words strike at the very heart of human self-justification. In declaring that remarriage after divorce constitutes adultery, Christ makes it clear that the original marriage bond remains in place in the eyes of God, regardless of civil recognition of a second union. No human court,

no social consensus, no legal decree can undo what God has joined.

Christ's words uphold the equality of men and women in moral responsibility. Unlike the prevailing cultural attitudes of His time, which often allowed men more leniency in matters of divorce and remarriage, Christ applies the same standard to both genders. The moral law is not different for man and woman; both are accountable before God for their fidelity to the covenant of marriage.

Marriage is not only a sacred institution—it is a symbol of something far greater. St. Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians, reveals the deeper mystery behind the marital bond: “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word, so as to present the church to himself in splendour, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind—yes, so that she may be holy and without blemish.” (Ephesians 5:25-27) Marriage is presented as an icon of Christ's love for His Church. Just as Christ's love is faithful, sacrificial,

and enduring, so too must the love between husband and wife reflect this divine fidelity. The unbreakable nature of marriage is not an arbitrary rule—it is a reflection of God’s own unchanging love for His people. The covenant of marriage, when lived faithfully, becomes a living testimony of the covenant between Christ and His Church.

In this light, divorce is not solely a failure in human relationships; it is a distortion of the divine image that marriage is meant to reflect. When a husband and wife are joined together in holy matrimony, they are not only pledging their love to one another—they are also entering into a sacred participation in God’s eternal plan. To break that bond is to undermine the very image of God’s unwavering love.

Christ’s words are difficult for many. They demand sacrifice. They require perseverance. In a fallen world, where sin, suffering, and human frailty are ever-present, the call to lifelong fidelity can seem overwhelming. Many seek ways to justify divorce, to make exceptions, to soften the teaching. But Christ does not waver. His words are not simply ideals to be admired and tossed aside—they are commands to be obeyed. Yet, He

does not leave us without grace. The same Christ who calls us to faithfulness also provides the strength to live it. The Sacrament of Matrimony is not a burden—it is a means of sanctification. When lived in faith, marriage is a path to holiness, a means through which God's grace is poured out.

For those who struggle, for those who suffer in difficult marriages, the Church does not turn a blind eye. She calls her children to perseverance, to prayer, to seeking the grace of God in the midst of trial. The path is not easy, but it is blessed. Those who remain faithful in marriage, even through hardship, bear witness to the enduring love of Christ.

The words of Christ in Mark 10 are not open to reinterpretation or dilution. They are a declaration of the divine order, a call to faithfulness, a summons to live in accordance with the will of God. In an age where marriage is treated as disposable, where fidelity is undervalued, and where personal satisfaction is placed above covenantal commitment, the teaching of Christ remains a challenge. However, it is a challenge we must accept. To uphold the

sanctity of marriage is to uphold the image of God's love in the world. To remain faithful in marriage is to bear witness to the fidelity of Christ. To reject the permissiveness of the world is to stand as a beacon of truth in an age of compromise.

May we, as followers of Christ, embrace this high calling. May we honour the sacred bond of marriage as God intended from the beginning. And may our lives be a reflection of the divine love and fidelity that Christ has shown to His Church.

The Love of the Sacred Heart in the Orthodox Tradition

As we come to the close of the month of June, dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, we continue to meditate on the boundless love of Christ. While the devotion to the Sacred Heart has been especially cultivated in the West, its essence is deeply Orthodox—rooted in the love of God made manifest in the Incarnation, the Cross, and the Resurrection. The heart of Christ is the wellspring of divine mercy, overflowing with grace for all who seek Him. Let us reflect on five key aspects of this devotion in light of the Bible and Orthodox spirituality.

1. Prayer is essential in drawing close to the Sacred Heart. As the Lord Himself has promised: “A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.” (Ezekiel 36:26) Through prayer, repentance, and ascetic struggle, we allow Christ to reshape our hearts, making them tender and responsive to His divine love. The Orthodox life is one of synergy—our cooperation with the grace of God—so that our hearts may become reflections of His own.

2. The Sacred Heart is not only a symbol but a reality—it is the very love of Christ poured out for humanity. Just as He had compassion on the multitudes, healing the sick and feeding the hungry, we too must bear the burdens of others: “Bear one another’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ.” (Galatians 6:2) In the Orthodox Church, we see this love lived out in acts of mercy—feeding the poor, comforting the sorrowful, and interceding for the suffering. To venerate the Sacred Heart is to embody the sacrificial love of Christ in our daily lives.

3. The Sacred Heart of Jesus is a heart of forgiveness. From the Cross, He uttered the words: “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.” (Luke 23:34) We are called to imitate this boundless mercy: “Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.” (Ephesians 4:32) In Orthodox spirituality, forgiveness is essential for the healing of the soul. Without it, our hearts remain hardened. The Jesus Prayer—“Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner”—draws us into the compassionate embrace of Christ, softening our hearts through grace.

4. The Sacred Heart is not passive but active, always seeking the lost and uplifting the downtrodden. Our Lord Himself tells us: “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.” (Matthew 25:40) In the Orthodox tradition, acts of charity are seen as direct encounters with Christ. We serve Him in the hungry, the imprisoned, and the stranger. True devotion to the Sacred Heart compels us to become vessels of divine love in a world desperate for healing.

5. To love the Sacred Heart is to love Christ wholly and completely: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.” (Deuteronomy 6:5) This love is cultivated through prayer, the sacraments, and the life of the Church. Keeping an icon of Christ Pantocrator or Christ the Good Shepherd in our homes can serve as a reminder of His ever-present love. Participating in the Divine Liturgy and receiving the Eucharist—the very Body and Blood of the One whose Heart was pierced for our salvation—draws us ever closer to Him.

By embracing these practices, we allow the

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Sacred Heart of Jesus to transform us, filling us with divine love and guiding us to eternal communion with Him. May our hearts be set aflame with the same love that burns in the Heart of Christ, for “God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.” (1 John 4:16)

Christ's Love Through the Sacred Heart in the Orthodox Tradition

“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11:28-30)

The infinite love of Jesus Christ for each of us is perfectly expressed in His Sacred Heart. In Orthodox theology, the heart is not merely a symbol of emotion but the very centre of our spiritual being—the place where God meets man. The Sacred Heart of Jesus is the wellspring of divine love, revealing God's mercy and compassion through His Incarnation, Passion, and Resurrection. This love is not a distant or abstract concept; it is the living and active presence of Christ, calling us to participate in His divine life.

Just as the shepherd seeks his lost sheep, Christ, with His Sacred Heart, seeks each of us. He knows our struggles, our sorrows, and our sins. He does not stand apart from our suffering but enters

into it, carrying us upon His shoulders like the lost sheep: “What do you think? If a shepherd has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray?” (Matthew 18:12) This is the love of the Sacred Heart—an unfailing love that seeks, finds, and rejoices over every soul that returns to Him. In the Orthodox tradition, we experience this divine love most profoundly in the Holy Mysteries, especially in Confession and the Eucharist, where Christ heals and restores us to communion with Him.

The Sacred Heart of Jesus is a heart that heals. The wounds of sin, the pains of life, and the burdens of our daily struggles all find their remedy in Him. The Church Fathers teach that Christ took on human nature to heal it from within, offering His own life as the balm for our wounded souls: “He heals the broken-hearted, and binds up their wounds.” (Psalm 147:3) This divine healing is not merely a temporary relief but a restoration of our souls, drawing us ever deeper into His grace. Through prayer, repentance, and the sacraments, we allow the love of the Sacred

Heart to penetrate our lives, transforming our hearts into vessels of His mercy.

The Sacred Heart of Jesus calls us to reflect on the depth of His love—a love that never ceases to seek us out, to heal, and to welcome us home. It is a love that is patient, kind, and boundless in mercy: “I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you.” (Jeremiah 31:3) No matter how far we have strayed, no matter how broken we may feel, Christ’s Sacred Heart is always open, always ready to embrace us. In the Orthodox spiritual life, we are called to cultivate this awareness through the Jesus Prayer, fasting, and acts of charity—each an opportunity to enter more fully into His love.

To love the Sacred Heart of Jesus is to respond to His love with faith and devotion. This means seeking Him daily in prayer, living according to His commandments, and loving others as He has loved us. It means recognising that, even in our weakest moments, His mercy never fails: “The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.”

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(Lamentations 3:22-23) Through veneration of Christ's Sacred Heart, we are reminded that His love is not just for the righteous but for all who turn to Him in repentance. The more we open our hearts to Him, the more we are transformed into His likeness, shining as beacons of His divine love in the world.

May we always seek refuge in the Sacred Heart of Jesus, allowing His boundless love to sustain and guide us, now and forever. Amen.

God's Mercy in the Sacrament

“The eyes of all look hopefully to you, and you give them their food at the right time.”

In Psalm 145:14-20, we encounter an immense expression of God's divine providence and compassion, reflecting the Orthodox understanding of our loving and merciful Creator. The Lord upholds all who fall and raises up those who are bowed down, offering strength and solace to those who turn to Him in humility. His mercy is boundless, extending to all who seek Him with a sincere heart. All creation looks to God in hope, recognising Him as the source of all sustenance, both physical and spiritual. The Orthodox Church teaches that Christ nourishes His people through the Holy Eucharist, the true Body and Blood of our Lord, which grants us the grace to persevere in our journey toward Theosis—union with God. Through this divine gift, we partake in the very life of Christ, being transformed and strengthened in faith.

God's mercy is made manifest in the Sacrament of Confession, where He, as the Good Shepherd,

welcomes the repentant with open arms. The Orthodox tradition emphasises that confession is not merely juridical but medicinal, a healing encounter with Christ through the priest, who stands as a witness to God's mercy. As St. John Chrysostom teaches, "The Church is a hospital, and not a courtroom." Through sincere repentance, we receive not only forgiveness but restoration, as God's mercy cleanses and renews the soul.

"The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth." (Psalm 145:18) His providence guides those who love Him, fulfilling their deepest needs according to His divine wisdom. In times of trial, we trust in His unfailing care, knowing that He watches over His faithful and grants them His peace. Orthodox Christians live in the assurance that God's mercy is ever-present, leading us through the sacraments, prayer, and acts of love to a deeper communion with Him.

May we, as faithful followers of Christ, become witnesses of His boundless grace, reflecting His

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mercy to the world through our lives, our prayers,
and our service to others.

The Lord, Our Majestic King

“The Lord is king! Let the earth rejoice; let the many coastlands be glad!” (Psalm 97:1)

Our God reigns in majesty, clothed in light and splendour beyond all comprehension. The psalmist calls us to lift our hearts in praise and adoration, for the Lord is the Most High over all the earth. In Orthodox hymnography, we repeatedly proclaim: “The Lord is King, He is clothed with majesty!” (Psalm 93:1) This declaration is not mere poetry but a theological truth—God’s dominion is absolute, His authority unshakable, and His providence governs all things visible and invisible.

In a world marred by instability and uncertainty, we take refuge in the knowledge that the Lord reigns. He is not a distant ruler, indifferent to our struggles, but the loving King who knows each of us by name. As Christ reveals in the Gospel: “Even the hairs of your head are all counted.” (Matthew 10:30) This same King who upholds the cosmos desires to dwell within us, guiding our steps as a loving Shepherd.

The psalmist states that God's throne is established on righteousness and justice (Psalm 97:2). These are not abstract qualities but living realities reflected in the Incarnate Word, our Lord Jesus Christ, who came to fulfil all righteousness. In the Orthodox spiritual life, we are called to mirror this divine righteousness, striving for purity of heart and justice in our dealings with others. As St. John Chrysostom exhorts us: "Do you wish to honour the body of Christ? Do not allow it to be scorned in its members, that is, in the poor who lack clothing to cover themselves." Our faith must be lived out through love and action, bringing the light of Christ into the darkness of the world.

While the Lord is enthroned in glory, He is also near to those who call upon Him in truth (Psalm 145:18). Christians must approach God in awe and reverence, yet with the confidence of a beloved child. Through prayer, the Holy Mysteries, and a life of repentance, we enter into communion with our King. As we bow before His majesty, we also experience His mercy, for "The Lord is gracious

and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.” (Psalm 145:8)

When trials arise, when temptations cloud our vision, and when the world lures us away from the narrow path, we must remember: the Lord is King! His rule is eternal, and His faithfulness endures from generation to generation. May each of us, therefore, proclaim His dominion not only with our lips but through our very lives. By our love, our humility, and our unwavering trust in Him, may we become living icons of His Kingdom, shining as beacons of hope in a world longing for His reign.

“For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.” (Psalm 100:5)

Embracing Divine Peace and Salvation

“Let me hear what God the Lord will speak, for he will speak peace to his people, to his faithful, to those who turn to him in their hearts. Surely his salvation is at hand for those who fear him, that his glory may dwell in our land.” (Psalm 85:8-9)

In the midst of the distractions and burdens of daily life, it is crucial that we take time to quiet our souls and listen to the voice of the Lord. The psalmist reminds us that God speaks peace to His people and to those who turn their hearts toward Him. This peace is not simply an absence of turmoil but the deep and abiding presence of Christ within us. The stillness (*hesychia*) practised by the saints teaches us that the Lord reveals Himself to those who cultivate interior silence and attentive prayer. Just as the Prophet Elijah did not find God in the wind, earthquake, or fire but in a still, small voice (1 Kings 19:11-13), so too must we seek Him in the quiet depths of our hearts.

The psalmist speaks of those who are “converted to the heart.” This is not only an outward change,

but also a deep transformation of the soul—a turning away from sin and toward God. This inner change is the essence of *metanoia*, a continuous and lifelong repentance that reorients us toward divine communion. Through prayer, fasting, and participation in the Holy Mysteries, we allow God’s grace to reshape us, drawing us into a life of holiness and closer union with Him. St. Isaac the Syrian teaches: “Make peace with yourself, and heaven and earth will make peace with you.” When we truly repent, peace enters not only our own hearts but extends to those around us, manifesting the Kingdom of God in our midst.

The Psalm also speaks of “the fear of the Lord,” a phrase often misunderstood. This is not a terror before an angry deity, but rather a deep reverence, awe, and love for God’s majesty. St. Anthony the Great explains: “I no longer fear God, but I love Him. For perfect love casts out fear.” When we stand in awe of God’s holiness, recognising His boundless mercy and love, we open ourselves to His transforming grace. The psalmist assures us that salvation is near to those who hold this reverence, for it is in humility and trust that we are drawn into God’s embrace.

When we allow God's peace and salvation to take root in our lives, we experience a true and lasting transformation. The peace of Christ is not fleeting or dependent on external circumstances, but a gift that sustains us through trials and tribulations. As our souls are conformed to Christ, His presence within us radiates outward, allowing us to become beacons of His peace in the world.

May we therefore seek the Lord in stillness, turn our hearts fully to Him in repentance, and cultivate a holy reverence for His majesty. In doing so, we will come to know the peace that surpasses all understanding, a peace that is not of this world but of the Kingdom of God.

God's Strength and Mercy

The reading from the Wisdom of Solomon (12:13,16-19) reveals the nature of our God as the one true and sovereign Lord who cares for all creation. In these verses, we are given deeper insight into the attributes of God that should shape our understanding of His divine character and our response to Him. The passage begins by declaring, "For neither is there any god besides you." The Lord alone is the supreme authority over all things, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. He is not distant or indifferent, but actively involved in the affairs of His creation. Unlike the false gods of the world, who are powerless and lifeless, our God is the living and loving Lord who tends to every aspect of existence with perfect wisdom and justice.

The passage also assures us of the righteousness of God's judgement. We find comfort in the fact that God, who knows all things, never condemns unjustly. His justice is not like the flawed and imperfect justice of men, which is often tainted by prejudice, error, or selfish motives. Rather, God's justice is pure, unerring, and deeply rooted

in His infinite wisdom. He sees the depths of our hearts, understanding our struggles, weaknesses, and desires. His judgements are never arbitrary or cruel but are always measured with fairness and compassion.

We see here the inseparable link between God's might and His justice. The world often perceives strength as domination, as the ability to overpower and control. But God's strength is not a mere demonstration of force; it is the perfection of divine justice. His dominion over all things does not lead to tyranny but to mercy and righteousness. As we read in the passage, "Your might is the source of justice; your mastery over all things makes you lenient to all." God's power enables Him to be patient and merciful. He does not crush the sinner but gives every opportunity for repentance. This is the great paradox of divine strength-it is manifested not in destruction, but in patience and love.

God's leniency is not a sign of weakness, as the world might assume, but a testament to His divine mercy. In His forbearance, He does not immediately punish those who stray, but gently

calls them to repentance. This is the pattern we see throughout the history of salvation. From Adam and Eve, to the Israelites in the wilderness, to the sinners whom Christ Himself encountered during His earthly ministry, God continually extends His mercy, desiring not the death of a sinner but that he should turn back and live (Ezekiel 18:23). The passage also teaches us that when people reject God's power, He reveals His might in ways that confound unbelievers. Just as Pharaoh refused to recognise God's authority and was ultimately humbled, so too will those who resist God's will be confronted by His power. To those who trust in Him, however, His might is not a cause for fear but for reverence and awe. The saints do not tremble at God's strength but rejoice in it, knowing that His power is their refuge and protection.

Despite His supreme authority, God's judgement is tempered with clemency. He, who has the ultimate power to judge, chooses to exercise His authority with gentleness and understanding. Unlike human rulers who may impose their authority with severity, God governs us as a loving Father, guiding rather than crushing, correcting

rather than condemning. This is most beautifully revealed in Christ, who, though being the Judge of all, came into the world not to condemn it but to save it (John 3:17). In His earthly life, Christ exhibited this divine justice mingled with mercy. He dined with sinners, forgave the adulterous woman, healed the sick, and called even the most hardened hearts to repentance.

Through these verses, we are given wisdom to apply in our own lives. God teaches us that true justice must be inseparable from kindness. Those who seek to live justly must also demonstrate compassion, especially towards those who are weak, lost, or in need of mercy. Too often, we are quick to judge others harshly while expecting leniency for ourselves. Yet God calls us to imitate Him, to be merciful as He is merciful (Luke 6:36). This applies not only to our personal interactions but also to our broader approach to justice in society, within our communities, and even within the Church. Justice without mercy leads to cruelty, while mercy without justice leads to permissiveness. God, in His perfection, balances both.

Brethren, this passage gives us a great assurance of hope. God offers us the possibility of repentance, promising forgiveness and redemption to those who turn to Him. No sin is too great for His mercy, no soul too lost for His love. This should inspire us to approach Him with confidence, seeking His forgiveness with sincere hearts. The sacraments of the Church, especially Holy Confession and the Eucharist, are the channels through which we experience this divine mercy first-hand. When we confess our sins, we do not stand before a ruthless judge but before a loving Father who welcomes us back with open arms. And when we partake of the Holy Mysteries, we are united to Christ, receiving the strength to walk in His ways.

We are called to imitate the divine attributes of God. We must embrace justice, tempered with kindness, and show mercy and compassion to those around us. Just as God is patient with us, we must be patient with others. Just as He forgives, we must also forgive. In doing so, we become true children of our Heavenly Father, reflecting His love and righteousness in the world.

May each of us cultivate a spirit of humility and repentance, trusting in God's generous invitation to turn away from sin and embrace His forgiveness. Let us live as a testimony to God's love, reflecting His justice, kindness, and mercy in all that we do. And may we, in our own small ways, become vessels of His grace, bringing light and hope to a world so desperately in need of His presence.

What Kind of Ground?

“That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the lake. Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many things in parables, saying: ‘Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Let anyone with ears listen!’” (Matthew 13:1-8)

In this parable, Christ reveals the reality of God’s Word and its power to transform lives. He invites us to examine the disposition of our hearts, for just as soil determines the growth of a seed, so too does the state of our soul determine the fruitfulness of the Gospel in our lives. Just as a

farmer scatters seed upon different kinds of soil, so does our Lord scatter the seed of His Word across the hearts of men. The outcome, however, depends not upon the seed itself, which is always good, but upon the soil which receives it. Christ speaks of four types of soil: the path, the rocky ground, the thorny ground, and the good soil. These represent the varied conditions of the human heart. The parable is not merely a commentary on different people; it is an invitation to self-examination. Each of us must ask: What kind of soil am I? What condition is my heart in?

The first kind of soil is the path where the seed is trampled underfoot and devoured by the birds. This represents a heart hardened by sin, pride, or indifference—a soul that has grown callous to the voice of God. The Word is spoken, but it does not penetrate; it is quickly snatched away by the enemy, much like the distractions and temptations of the world that prevent us from receiving God's truth. Such a soul may hear the Gospel repeatedly, yet it remains unyielding. This hardness of heart can come from a habitual rejection of God's grace, an unwillingness to

repent, or a spirit of self-sufficiency that refuses to depend on God.

The second kind of soil is the rocky ground, where the seed initially springs up but has no depth of root. This represents those who receive the Word with enthusiasm but lack perseverance. They rejoice in God's truth for a time, but when trials, suffering, or persecution arise, their faith withers away. How many souls begin their spiritual journey with fervour, yet fall away when the cost of discipleship becomes apparent? Christ tells us that we must take up our cross daily (Luke 9:23). If we desire to be fruitful, we must cultivate deep roots in prayer, fasting, and the sacraments, so that we may withstand the storms that inevitably come.

The third kind of soil is thorn-infested ground. The seed takes root and grows, but is soon choked by weeds. Christ explains that these weeds are the "cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature." (Luke 8:14) This is the danger of a divided heart—one that receives the Word of God but remains entangled in worldly attachments. This type of soil is the

most deceptive, for here the seed does grow, yet never reaches its full potential. Many believers live in this condition, struggling to prioritise God amidst the distractions of career, entertainment, and material pursuits. The thorns of worldliness must be uprooted so that the Word can flourish unhindered.

The good soil is the heart that is open, receptive, and prepared. It is a heart that is free from hardness, shallowness, and worldliness. This is the soul that receives the Word of God with faith, nurtures it through prayer and obedience, and allows it to bear fruit in abundance. But what makes soil good? The good soil is characterised by humility, repentance, and a longing for holiness. It is a heart that surrenders to God's will and allows the Holy Spirit to cultivate virtue and grace. Yet, even good soil must be tilled and tended. Just as a garden requires continuous care—removing weeds, adding nourishment, and receiving sunlight—so too does our soul require ongoing spiritual cultivation. The sacraments, especially the Eucharist and Confession, are the nourishment that strengthens the seed of faith. Prayer and fasting deepen our roots, making us

resilient against trials. Alms-giving and acts of mercy are the natural fruits that grow from a soul well-rooted in Christ.

The Lord's parable is not simply an allegory; it is an invitation. Our Lord calls us to examine our own spiritual condition. Are we hardened by pride? Are we shallow in our faith, only committed when it is convenient? Are we entangled in the distractions of the world? Or are we allowing the Word of God to transform us, bearing fruit for His Kingdom? If we find our hearts are not yet good soil, let us not despair. The Divine Gardener is ready to till the soil of our souls. The hardness of our hearts can be broken by repentance, the rocks of superficial faith can be removed through perseverance, and the thorns of worldly distraction can be uprooted by seeking first the Kingdom of God. Our Lord desires that we become fertile ground, producing a harvest thirtyfold, sixtyfold, and a hundredfold (Mark 4:8).

May we, with the help of the Holy Spirit, cultivate hearts that are truly receptive to God's Word. May we seek Him with undivided hearts, allowing His

grace to transform us, so that we may bear abundant fruit for the glory of God. May we embrace this call with urgency, for the time of sowing will soon give way to the time of harvest. May our lives be a testimony to the power of God's Word, and may we, on the day of judgement, be found among those who have yielded a bountiful crop for the Kingdom of Heaven.

Jesus, the Good Shepherd

Jesus is the Good Shepherd who tirelessly seeks out His sheep, and His love knows no bounds. In the Gospel of John, Jesus declares, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” (John 10:11) These words reveal the depth of Christ’s love, a love that is neither superficial nor temporary, but one that embraces all of humanity with unwavering devotion. He is not a hired hand who abandons the sheep in times of peril; rather, He stands firm, offering His very life to protect, nurture, and guide His flock.

When we reflect on Jesus’ role as the Good Shepherd, we must understand the sheer magnitude of His sacrifice. His love led Him to endure the agony of the Cross for our salvation. He willingly bore the weight of our sins, taking upon Himself the punishment that was rightfully ours. Betrayed, humiliated, scourged, and crucified, Jesus endured it all out of an unfathomable love for each of us. His sacrifice was not an obligation but a willing act of self-giving, demonstrating the ultimate expression of divine love. However, Christ’s love did not end on Calvary. His work as the Good Shepherd

continues through His constant presence in our lives. He walks with us, leading us away from sin and toward the green pastures of righteousness. He is our guide, our protector, and our sustainer. He knows each one of us intimately, calling us by name and leading us with gentle authority. “I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me.” (John 10:14) This deep, personal knowledge means that no matter how lost or broken we may feel, Christ never turns away. Instead, He draws near, lifting us from our despair and setting us back on the path of grace.

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus uses the imagery of a shepherd searching for lost sheep to illustrate the depth of His mercy. In Matthew 18:12-14, He tells us of a shepherd who leaves the ninety-nine to seek out the one lost sheep. This parable reveals that no soul is insignificant in the eyes of God. When we stray from Him, He does not abandon us. Instead, He pursues us with relentless love, calling us back to Him with open arms. How often do we feel lost, confused, or isolated in our struggles? How frequently do we allow sin, despair, or the distractions of the world to lead us away from the safety of Christ’s fold?

Yet even in these moments, Christ does not give up on us. His love is steadfast, unwavering, and all-encompassing. Even when we fail to recognise His voice, He continues to call us, seeking to bring us back into His embrace.

The love of Christ is not conditional, quickly passing, or dependent on our worthiness. It is a love that transcends our faults, our failures, and our shortcomings. It is a love that heals, redeems, and restores. Christ does not love us because we are perfect—He loves us despite our imperfections and desires our sanctification. His love is not merely an emotion; it is a genuine life-changing force that reforms our hearts, leading us toward holiness. We must, therefore, open our hearts to His love. The Good Shepherd invites us to trust in His guidance, to surrender ourselves fully to His care, and to allow Him to lead us to true peace. When we follow Him, we begin to reflect His own selfless love in our daily lives. We become more compassionate, more forgiving, and more willing to serve others, especially those who are suffering or in need.

As we partake in the Holy Eucharist, we must

remember that it is the ultimate expression of the Good Shepherd's love. In this most blessed sacrament, Christ gives us His very self—His Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity. “Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them.” (John 6:56) This is the real presence of Jesus, sustaining and nourishing our souls. Through the Eucharist, the Shepherd strengthens His sheep, ensuring that they remain close to Him. Each time we receive the Eucharist, we are invited to renew our commitment to follow Christ, to trust in His providence, and to remain within His loving fold. The Eucharist is a sacrament of love, a gift that sustains us on our journey of faith, drawing us ever closer to the heart of the Good Shepherd.

To be true followers of Jesus Christ, we must also imitate Him in our lives. Just as He laid down His life for us, we are called to lay down our lives in service to others. This means embracing selflessness, offering forgiveness, and showing mercy. It means seeking out the lost, comforting the sorrowful, and guiding those who have strayed. Where confusion and spiritual darkness surround us, we are called to shine the light of

Christ. Through prayer, regular Bible reading and study, and participation in the Sacraments, we strengthen our relationship with Him, allowing His love to shape our words and actions. The Good Shepherd not only calls us to follow Him but to share in His mission—to shepherd others with the same love and devotion that He has shown to us.

May we never forget that we are precious in His sight, cherished beyond all measure. No matter how far we have wandered, the Good Shepherd remains near, ready to carry us home. His voice calls out to us each day—through Scripture, through the Church, through the stillness of our hearts. May each of us listen attentively, respond faithfully, and follow Him without hesitation.

With unwavering confidence in His care, may we entrust our lives to Jesus, the Good Shepherd, who loves us beyond all comprehension and who leads us ever closer to the eternal pastures of His heavenly kingdom.

Dying in Christ

“If, then, we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him.” (Romans 6:8)

St. Paul writes about a truth that lies at the very heart of our faith—we have died in Christ. This reality, though seemingly paradoxical, holds the key to our redemption and the hope of eternal life. Through the sacrament of baptism, we were mystically united with Christ in His death and resurrection. As the water flowed over us, we were cleansed of sin and reborn into the family of God. This moment marked not just a symbolic transformation but a very deep spiritual reality—we were buried with Christ so that we might rise with Him. To die in Christ means to surrender our old selves—marked by selfishness, pride, and attachment to worldly things—and to be conformed to Him in all things. It is to lay down our will and embrace the will of the Father, just as Christ did in Gethsemane. It is to crucify our passions and sinful tendencies, allowing the Holy Spirit to renew us, so that we may live not for ourselves, but for Christ who dwells within us.

This dying is not a one-time event but an ongoing process in the Christian life. St. Paul says, “I die every day!” (1 Corinthians 15:31), showing us that the Christian life is a continuous turning away from sin and a turning toward God. Each day presents opportunities to die to our own desires and to embrace the life of Christ within us. This dying happens in the small acts of charity we show to others, in our willingness to forgive, in our patience during trials, and in our faithfulness to prayer.

To die in Christ is to embrace the Cross. Suffering is an inevitable part of life, yet for those who are united with Christ, suffering is not meaningless. When we unite our sufferings with the Passion of Christ, they take on redemptive power. “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church.” (Colossians 1:24). This does not mean that Christ’s sacrifice was insufficient—rather, it means that we are invited to participate in His redemptive work. Every pain, every hardship, every loss becomes a means by which we draw

nearer to Him and intercede for the salvation of souls.

The martyrs of the Church give us the ultimate example of what it means to die in Christ. They did not cling to their earthly lives, but joyfully gave them up for the sake of the Kingdom. Whether in the coliseums of ancient Rome or in the quiet sacrifices of daily life, all Christians are called to witness to the power of Christ's death and resurrection.

Dying in Christ is not simply about suffering; it is also about hope. "For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his." (Romans 6:5) The Christian life does not end in death—it is a passage to eternal life. Just as Christ's tomb was not the end but the gateway to glory, so too is our dying in Christ the path to true and everlasting life. Our present sufferings are but a preparation for the glory that is to come, and every cross we bear brings us closer to the joy of the resurrection.

As we continue our journey of the one true faith,

let us embrace this calling to die in Christ daily. Let us surrender our fears, our sins, and our selfishness, knowing that in doing so, we make room for His divine life to dwell within us. Let us take up our crosses with love, uniting them to His perfect sacrifice. And let us trust in the promise of His resurrection, knowing that if we die with Him, we shall also live with Him, now and for all eternity.

There is One Bread

“The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.” (1 Corinthians 10:16-17)

In these words of the Apostle Paul, we perceive the sacred mystery of the Holy Eucharist, the very centre of our life in Christ. The cup that we bless and the bread that we break are not mere symbols, nor are they common food and drink. They are the very Body and Blood of our Lord, given to us for the remission of sins and for eternal life. In the Divine Liturgy, we do not simply commemorate Christ’s sacrifice as an event of the past; rather, we enter into the timeless reality of His sacrifice, made present to us through the Holy Spirit.

From the earliest days of the Church, the Eucharist has been the bond of unity among the faithful, drawing all who partake into one mystical body. St. Ignatius of Antioch wrote: “Be diligent,

therefore, to partake of one Eucharist; for there is one flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, and one cup to show forth the unity of His blood.” In the partaking of the one bread, we are not simply individuals coming together; we are the Church, the Body of Christ, in communion with Him and with each other. For example, consider the image of the bread. Before it becomes the Eucharist, it is composed of many grains of wheat, crushed and kneaded together. These grains, though distinct, lose their separateness to become one loaf. So too are we, though many, united in Christ. Our divisions—whether of nationality, language, or status—are dissolved in the presence of the Holy Mysteries. In this, we see that the Church is not only a collection of individuals, but a divine reality, bound together by Christ Himself. Yet, to partake of the Eucharist is not a light matter. St. Paul also warns that “whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord.” (1 Corinthians 11:27) This is why we approach the chalice with fear and trembling, with a heart purified by repentance and a soul yearning for union with Christ. The Eucharist is not a mere ritual or obligation; it is

the mystical marriage feast of the Lamb, a foretaste of the heavenly banquet.

As Orthodox Christians, we must live in accordance with this sacred gift. If we are united as one body in Christ, then we must strive for peace among ourselves, casting aside anger, resentment, and selfishness. Just as Christ humbled Himself for our sake, so must we humble ourselves before one another. The Eucharist compels us to love sacrificially, to forgive freely, and to seek reconciliation. Our participation in the Eucharist is not confined to the walls of the church. We are called to carry the grace we receive into the world, becoming vessels of Christ's love and mercy. Just as Christ offers Himself to us completely, so too must we offer ourselves in service to our brethren, especially the poor, the suffering, and those in need of compassion.

May we then approach the Holy Mysteries with awe and thanksgiving, knowing that in this bread and cup, we receive Christ Himself. Let us strive to live in a manner worthy of this great gift, so that we may truly be one body in Him. And let us

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pray that the unity we share at the Holy Table may be reflected in our lives, bearing witness to the love and peace of Christ in a divided world.

May the Holy Eucharist strengthen us, sanctify us, and prepare us for the eternal banquet in the Kingdom of Heaven. Amen.

God's Infinite Love

“God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life.” (John 3:16)

In this single verse, we encounter the fullness of God's love, as it reveals the Father's sacrificial gift of His Son, Jesus Christ, and the promise of eternal life through faith in Him. It is through the Trinity, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, that this incredible love is made known to us, drawing us into a deeper relationship with God. God the Father, in His infinite love, sent His Son into the world as the ultimate expression of His love. Jesus, the Son, willingly took on human flesh, dwelt among us, and ultimately offered Himself on the Cross for our salvation. The Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, continues to breathe life into the Church, guiding and sanctifying us as we journey toward eternal life.

In contemplating the mystery of the Trinity, we are called to respond to this love with faith, trust, and obedience. Just as John 3:16 reminds us, it is through believing in Jesus Christ that we receive

the gift of eternal life. This belief goes beyond mere intellectual assent; it requires a surrender of our hearts, a total trust in God's promises, and a willingness to follow Christ's and the Church's historic teachings.

As we contemplate upon the Most Holy Trinity, let us open our hearts to God's boundless love. Let us contemplate the depth of His sacrifice, the unfathomable mercy poured out for our salvation. May this contemplation ignite within us a renewed commitment to love and serve one another, imitating the selflessness of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

In a world longing for love and meaning, may we be bearers of the Trinitarian love, sharing the good news of salvation with those around us. Let us live in the light of John 3:16, cherishing the eternal life that is offered through Christ and inviting others to experience this life-transforming love.

May the Most Holy Trinity, the embodiment of divine love, guide and bless us always.

The Glory of Christ and the Power of His Church

“...that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.” (Ephesians 1:17-23, OSB)

As we stand in the presence of the living God, let us turn our hearts toward the words of the holy Apostle Paul in his letter to the Ephesians,

particularly his prayer for the believers in Ephesus. These words reveal to us the splendour of God's divine wisdom, the richness of His calling, and the majesty of Christ's authority over all creation. They help us realise the immeasurable grace given to those who are called into the Body of Christ and of the power that is at work in us through faith.

In this prayer, the Apostle Paul does not simply offer words of encouragement—he presents to us a vision of the divine reality in which we, as members of Christ's Church, participate. This passage is not concerned with earthly success or material gain; it lifts our minds to the spiritual riches that come from union with Christ. Paul's prayer is that the faithful may receive wisdom, not the wisdom of the world, but divine wisdom—a wisdom that comes from the Father of glory Himself. This wisdom is not an abstract concept, nor is it attained by the intellect alone, but it is given through revelation, through the opening of the eyes of the heart, so that we may behold the greatness of God's calling.

St. Paul speaks of the hope to which we have

been called. This is not an uncertain or wavering hope, but a firm and unshakable confidence in the promises of God. This hope is grounded in Christ's resurrection, in the unbreakable covenant He has established with His Church. It is the hope of eternal life, of sharing in the glory of the saints, and of being brought into perfect communion with God. The world seeks hope in temporary things—in wealth, in human accomplishments, in transitory pleasures—but these all pass away. The Christian, however, stands on a foundation that cannot be shaken. We are called to live in this hope, to let it shape our thoughts, our actions, and our very identity. This hope is not passive; it is a calling, a summons to holiness, a beckoning toward the heavenly kingdom. To walk in this hope is to live with our eyes fixed not on the things of this world but on the eternal inheritance prepared for us.

Paul also speaks of the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints. The Church is not an institution of human making, but the dwelling place of God. The saints, those who have been sanctified by the Holy Spirit, are the living members of the Body of Christ, and in them, the

riches of God's glory are revealed. This inheritance is not something we receive only at the end of time; it is something we participate in now, as members of Christ's Holy Church.

The saints—both those who have gone before us and those living among us—are a testament to the greatness of God's work in humanity. Their lives are a witness to the transforming power of divine grace. The Church is not a gathering of the strong and the self-sufficient, but of those who have been made strong through the power of Christ. Through the prayers of the saints, through their intercessions, and through their example, we are called to share in their inheritance, to strive for holiness, and to become vessels of God's glory in this world.

St. Paul then speaks of the immeasurable greatness of God's power toward us who believe. This power is not like the power of kings or rulers, nor is it like the strength of armies or nations. It is the power of the Resurrection, the power that raised Christ from the dead and seated Him at the right hand of the Father. This power is the very life of God, the same divine

energy that created the heavens and the earth, the same power that will bring all things to completion on the Last Day. This power is not distant, nor is it reserved for a select few—it is at work in all who believe. It is the power that strengthens us in our struggles, that lifts us up when we fall, that enables us to persevere in times of trial. It is the power that transforms sinners into saints, that turns despair into joy, that heals wounds and restores what has been broken. But for this power to be effective in us, we must be willing to receive it. We must surrender ourselves completely to our Lord Jesus Christ, allowing His grace to work within us, purging us of all that is unworthy and filling us with His divine life.

Paul concludes by proclaiming Christ's absolute authority over all things. He has been raised above all principality, power, might, and dominion—above every name that is named, not only in this age but in the ages to come. There is no power, no force, no ruler that stands above Him. Every enemy will be put under His feet, and all things will be brought into subjection to His reign. Yet Christ is not a distant king ruling from

afar—He is the Head of the Church, and the Church is His Body. This means that His life flows into us, that His victory is our victory, and that His authority is at work in the world through His Church. The Church is not an earthly organisation; it is the fullness of Christ who fills all in all. It is through the Church that Christ continues His work of salvation, sanctifying and transforming the world.

As we reflect on these words, we must ask ourselves: Do we seek the wisdom and revelation of God? Do we live in the hope of His calling? Do we recognise the power of God at work in us? These are not abstract questions; they are the foundation of our Christian life.

To seek God's wisdom means to immerse ourselves in prayer, in the study of the Bible, and in the life of the Church. It means turning away from the distractions and deceptions of the world and fixing our eyes on Christ. To live in hope means not to be swayed by the anxieties and uncertainties of this world, but to stand firm in the knowledge that God's promises are sure. To embrace the power of God means to allow Him to

work through us, to transform us, and to use us for His glory.

May we be a people who seek the wisdom of God, who live in the hope of our calling, and who walk in the power of the risen Christ. May our lives be a testimony to His glory, and may His Holy Church shine forth as the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

The Descent of the Holy Spirit Upon the Samaritans

“Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them. And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed; and many who were paralysed and lame were healed. And there was great joy in that city...Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 8:5-8, 14-17, OSB)

The passage from the Acts of the Apostles reveals the divine power of the Holy Spirit at work in the early Church, manifesting both in signs and in the transformation of those who received the Word of God. The Apostle Philip, filled with apostolic

zeal, went to the city of Samaria to proclaim Christ to a people long regarded as outsiders by the Jews. Despite centuries of hostility between Jews and Samaritans, the power of the Gospel broke through these divisions. The people of Samaria listened attentively to Philip's preaching, their hearts stirred by his words and by the miraculous signs that accompanied his ministry. The authority of Christ was revealed as unclean spirits fled at his command, crying out in terror, and the sick and the lame were restored to health. The city, which had been burdened by spiritual and physical affliction, was filled with joy.

This account demonstrates the reality of spiritual warfare. The presence of unclean spirits, and their resistance to the truth, shows that the dominion of darkness is real, but it cannot stand against the light of Christ. The signs worked through Philip were not spectacles but divine acts of mercy, revealing the victory of Christ over sin and death. When the people of Samaria believed and were baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus, they were incorporated into the Body of Christ. Yet, the passage makes it clear that something was

still lacking—they had not yet received the Holy Spirit in His fullness.

Upon hearing that Samaria had accepted the Word of God, the apostles in Jerusalem sent Peter and John to them. This reveals the unity and hierarchy of the Church. Philip, though a powerful preacher and worker of miracles, did not act apart from the apostolic authority. The faith of the Samaritans was genuine, their baptism valid, but the fullness of grace required the presence of the apostles, who were entrusted with the governance of the Church and the transmission of the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands. When Peter and John arrived, they prayed for the newly baptised, laid hands upon them, and they received the Holy Spirit. This moment is of great importance, for it affirms the apostolic nature of the gift of the Holy Spirit, a truth upheld in the life of the Church to this day.

This passage points directly to the Sacrament of Chrismation (Confirmation), which is the seal of the Holy Spirit given after Baptism. Baptism washes away sin and incorporates a person into the Church, but Chrismation bestows the

indwelling grace of the Holy Spirit, strengthening the believer for the Christian life. This is why, from the earliest times, the sacramental life of the Church has been administered through apostolic succession—grace is transmitted not arbitrarily, but through those whom Christ has chosen and set apart for this purpose. The laying on of hands by the apostles upon the Samaritans is a clear foreshadowing of this mystery.

This passage also teaches us that faith is not static; it requires growth and completion. The Samaritans believed, they were baptised, yet the fullness of their initiation into Christ was completed through the reception of the Holy Spirit. Likewise, we must not be content with an initial faith but must seek always to grow in the grace given to us. The Holy Spirit is not given once and forgotten—He is the One who continually sanctifies, illumines, and strengthens us in our journey towards salvation.

May each of us, therefore, pray that we may be fully receptive to the Holy Spirit, who heals, renews, and makes all things new. May we not resist His work in us but submit to His guidance,

that our hearts may be purified, our minds enlightened, and our souls filled with His divine power. Just as the city of Samaria was transformed through the power of the Gospel, so too may our lives be renewed by the grace of the Holy Spirit, who is ever at work in the Holy Church.

Loving God and Our Neighbour

The entire Christian life is summed up in the two great commandments given by our Lord Jesus Christ: to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind, and to love our neighbour as ourselves (Matthew 22:37-40). These commandments are not basic ideals but the very foundation of our salvation, for love is the essence of God's being, and to abide in love is to abide in Him. (1 John 4:16) However, love in the Christian sense is not simply an emotion or sentiment; it is an active and sacrificial way of life, inseparable from obedience to Christ and His commandments.

In the Holy Gospel according to St. John, our Lord solemnly stated: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." (John 14:15) This verse reveals a truth that is central to Orthodox spirituality—love and obedience are inseparable. In the Orthodox Church, we do not approach faith as a matter of intellectual assent alone, nor as an abstract belief in God's existence. To love Christ is to live in complete submission to Him, conforming ourselves to His divine will—He is our Sovereign King. This is why the life of the

Church, with her Holy Mysteries, ascetic practices, prayers, and fasting, exists—not as minimal religious duties but as the concrete means through which we manifest our love for God.

Our Lord further states: “Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him” (John 14:23). This is not a poetic metaphor but a literal reality. Through obedience and love, we become temples of the Holy Trinity, as St. Paul teaches: “Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?” (1 Corinthians 3:16) The presence of God is a real and tangible indwelling that transforms our very being. Our ascetic tradition teaches that through prayer, fasting, and repentance, we are purified and made capable of receiving the divine presence. The saints, through their holiness, became bearers of the divine light, manifesting visibly the presence of God within them.

Our Lord promises the coming of the Holy Spirit: “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you always, the

Spirit of truth.” (John 14:16-17) This promise was fulfilled at Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit descended upon the Apostles and filled them with divine power. The Holy Spirit is not simply a force or an impersonal influence but the third Person of the Holy Trinity, who sanctifies, illumines, and strengthens the faithful. In the Orthodox Church, the mystery of chrismation, which immediately follows baptism, is the personal Pentecost of each Christian, sealing them with the gift of the Holy Spirit. Without the Holy Spirit, no one can truly follow Christ, for it is He who enables us to live a life pleasing to God.

Thus, in light of these divine truths, our love for God cannot be separated from the life of the Church. It is within the Church that we receive the Holy Spirit, that we are taught how to love through obedience to Christ’s commandments, and that we are sanctified through the mysteries. The modern world pushes upon us and our families a false understanding of love—one that is self-serving, sentimental, and detached from divine truth. True love, as taught by Christ and preserved by the Holy Orthodox Church, is cruciform—it is a self-sacrificial giving of oneself

to God and to others. This is why the lives of the saints, filled with ascetic struggle, suffering, and self-denial, are the greatest testimonies of divine love.

As we reflect upon these words of our Lord in John 14, may each of us strive to live in obedience to His commandments, seeking not the quickly passing comforts of this world but the eternal joy of communion with the Holy Trinity. Let us not approach our faith with lukewarmness but with the zeal of the saints, who loved God with their whole being. And let us pray earnestly for the grace of the Holy Spirit, who alone can purify our hearts and enable us to love God and our neighbour as we are commanded. Through this, we will become true disciples of Christ, inheritors of His divine life, and partakers of His heavenly Kingdom.

May the Lord grant us the strength to love Him in word and in deed, and may the Most Holy Theotokos, who perfectly obeyed the will of God, intercede for us so that we may walk the path of salvation.

A Walk with a Stranger

The twenty-fourth chapter of the Gospel of St. Luke, beginning with verse thirteen, recounts an event that occurred on the first day of the week following the crucifixion and burial of our Lord. Two of Jesus' disciples were walking to a village called Emmaus, discussing the recent events that had unfolded—Jesus' death, His burial, and the strange reports of His resurrection that had begun to circulate. As they journeyed, a stranger approached and began walking with them, but they did not recognise Him. The stranger engaged them in conversation, asking them what they were discussing, and then began to open the Scriptures, showing them how the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus had been foretold by the Prophets. Upon reaching the village, the disciples invited the stranger to stay with them, and during the breaking of bread, their eyes were opened, and they recognised Him. However, He immediately vanished from their sight. In awe and joy, they immediately returned to Jerusalem to share the good news with the other disciples who had gathered there.

This event holds immense significance, as it is one of the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus, further confirming the reality of His resurrection. It offers a deeply significant reflection on the necessity of hope, faith, and the life-changing power of encountering the risen Christ. It also places great emphasis on the recognition of Jesus through the Scriptures and, most crucially, through the breaking of bread—a moment that points directly to the heart of the Holy Eucharist, the central sacrament of the Church. When we reflect on the specifics of this passage, we realise that the two disciples were in a state of profound grief and confusion. They had hoped that Jesus would be the one to redeem Israel, but His brutal death had shattered their expectations. They were left with questions, doubts, and despair. It is in this moment of loss that the “stranger” appeared to them. He offered them something far greater than the answer they had hoped for. Rather than merely providing consolation, He provided understanding. He opened the Scriptures to them, showing how the events they had witnessed were not a tragic end, but part of a divine plan that had been laid out from the very beginning.

In the conversation with the stranger, they were reminded that the suffering and death of the Messiah were not an unfortunate accident, but a necessary fulfilment of God's will. As it is written in the Scriptures of Israel, the Messiah must suffer and die for the salvation of humanity. Jesus' resurrection was the completion of that plan, the fulfilment of the promises made by God through the prophets. Their hearts were stirred as they listened to the stranger, yet they still did not recognise Him. This is an important point for us to consider, for it shows that even when Christ is present with us, we may not always recognise Him, especially when we are clouded by grief or confusion. It is not until the breaking of bread that the disciples' eyes are opened, and they recognise the stranger for who He truly is. This moment of recognition is deeply significant. The breaking of bread is not merely a symbolic gesture—it is a sacramental act that reveals the presence of the risen Christ. This act of breaking bread is a direct precursor to the institution of the Holy Eucharist, which we celebrate today. In the Eucharist, the risen Christ is made present to us, and it is in the reception of His Body and Blood that we encounter Him in the fullest sense.

The disciples' response to the recognition of Jesus is equally revealing. Their sorrow, which had weighed them down, was transformed into joy and hope. They were no longer disheartened but filled with the excitement and the urgency to share the good news with others. Their encounter with the risen Christ not only brought them joy, but it also impelled them to go forth and proclaim that joy to others. This is a key aspect of the Christian experience—the encounter with Christ must lead to action, to the sharing of the Gospel, to the spreading of His light in the world.

This passage speaks to us on a deeply personal level, reminding us that Jesus is present with us, even when we fail to recognise Him. It challenges us to have faith in God's plan, especially in times of hardship, confusion, or despair. The two disciples on the road to Emmaus were walking in darkness, both literally and metaphorically, but in the moment they encountered the risen Christ, they were filled with light and hope. Similarly, our journey through life may often seem dark, but the risen Christ is always with us, even when we fail to see Him. We are called to have faith and trust

that His presence is real, even when we do not perceive it.

Furthermore, this passage helps us see the life-changing power of encountering the risen Christ, especially in the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist. Just as the disciples' hearts were set aflame when they listened to Jesus explain the Scriptures, so too are our hearts set ablaze when we receive Christ in the Eucharist. It is not enough to simply know about Jesus; we must recognise Him in the breaking of the bread and allow that encounter to change us. The Eucharist is not just a remembrance of Christ's sacrifice; it is a living encounter with the risen Lord.

The biblical account of the disciples on the road to Emmaus offers a rich lesson for all Christians. It teaches us that even in moments of despair and confusion, we are never truly alone. Our Lord Jesus Christ walks with us, and if we open our hearts to Him, He will reveal Himself to us through His Word and through the breaking of bread. It is through this encounter that our hearts are renewed, our faith is deepened, and our lives are transformed. May we always recognise the

presence of Christ in our midst, especially in the Eucharist, and may our encounter with Him lead us to share His love and His truth with the world.

As it is written, “Then their eyes were opened, and they recognised him; and he vanished from their sight” (Luke 24:31). Let us open our eyes to see Christ in our lives, and may His presence be the source of our joy and our hope.

The Real Presence of Christ

The Holy Eucharist is at the heart of the Orthodox Christian life. We do not regard it as a mere symbol, nor as a theological abstraction, but as the true and actual presence of Christ—His Body and Blood, given to us for our salvation. As our Lord Himself declared: “Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day.” (John 6:53-54) From the earliest days of the Church, this has been the faith handed down by the Apostles. At the Mystical Supper, Christ took bread and wine and proclaimed: “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” (Luke 22:19) “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.” (Luke 22:20) The Holy Church has never wavered in the understanding that in the Divine Liturgy, through the invocation of the Holy Spirit, the bread and wine become, in truth, the Body and Blood of Christ. This is not a change that can be measured by human senses, but it is a reality known through faith and experience.

The Apostle Paul reinforces this mystery when he writes: “The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ?” (1 Corinthians 10:16) He further warns of the gravity of unworthy reception: “Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord.” (1 Corinthians 11:27) The Eucharist is not an ordinary meal but a divine encounter. To approach it casually or unworthily is to risk grave spiritual harm.

The Church has preserved this sacred mystery through the centuries, treating the Eucharist with the utmost reverence. The faithful prepare through prayer, fasting, and repentance, recognising that to receive the Holy Gifts is to partake of Christ Himself. As St. John Chrysostom exhorts, “When you see the Lord immolated and lying upon the altar, and the priest bent over that sacrifice praying, and all the people empurpled by that precious blood, can you think that you are still among men and on earth? Or are you not lifted up to heaven?”

The Eucharist is the centre of our worship, the means by which we are united with Christ and with one another in His Body, the Church. It is not merely a private devotion but the very life of the Church itself. We do not approach the Holy Mysteries with casual familiarity but with awe and love, knowing that in this sacred offering, Christ is truly present. “For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink.” (John 6:55) The Orthodox Church does not attempt to rationalise this mystery in philosophical terms, for it is beyond human comprehension. It is a truth revealed by Christ, confirmed by the Apostles, and experienced by the faithful throughout the ages. The Eucharist is our spiritual nourishment, our source of life, and our participation in the Kingdom of God. To receive it is to receive Christ Himself, and to be united with Him in body and soul.

This is why we must approach with faith, reverence, and preparation, lest we, as St. Paul warns, partake unworthily and bring judgement upon ourselves. The Eucharist is the very presence of Christ among us, and it is through this divine gift that we are sanctified and strengthened

in our journey towards eternal life. Let us, therefore, treasure this sacred mystery and receive it with fear and love, for it is indeed, as St. Ignatius of Antioch called it, “the medicine of immortality.”

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