



GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AUSTRALIA

PARISH OF THE ANNUNCIATION OF OUR LADY “EVANGELISMOS”

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* * * EPISTLE * * *

The Reading is from St Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians [4:1-7]

I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with long suffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, and in you all. But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift.

* * * EXPLANATION * * *

St Paul continued his oversight of churches in the area surrounding Ephesus while he was in prison. Letters and personal envoys were his means to encourage the Church in evangelism. The Christians had grown dispirited at the news of his imprisonment in Rome. But even in chains, he is still an ambassador for Christ and encourages them to walk worthy of their baptismal calling. He implores his hearers to realize what has been given to them, and to be in practice what they are in Christ. So he turns the focus of his letter from what God does for us to what we are to do in response. How you believe must affect how you live; belief must influence conduct. In baptism we were called to be saints, adopted sons and heirs of God so that we now dare to address the heavenly God as “Father”. (4:1) This life of holiness is characterized by St Paul as humility, meekness, patience and loving forbearance. (4:2) All of these virtues are needed if we are to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. These basic characteristics of Christians are the virtues which contribute to unity. Although we are many persons, we share one new nature. This unity is not something we are called upon to produce ourselves, but it is the sovereign and unbreakable gift of the Holy Spirit to His Church. Unity is one of the characteristics of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. Our union with Christ’s Body is due to the greatness of God, not ourselves. Even the cohesiveness of this body is God’s work in the Spirit. The unity that binds us one to another is the very unity that unites the Father to the Son. The fallen and unredeemed world is characterized by disunity – wars, factions, hatred and mutual separation. So there is no place for quarrelling, xenophobia and wrath. Therefore, we must endeavour to keep this unity by a bond of peace. Peace of heart within and peace of relations

between us binds together in a mutual bond. This bond is not oppressive, but liberating. For it not only unites us one to another, but unites all to Christ. By not breaking this bond and thus shattering the peace between us, we preserve the unity of the Church and walk worthy of our calling. (4:3) As an encouragement to help them maintain unity and not create divisions and factions within the Church, St Paul stresses that they all belong to one Body and have all received one and the same Spirit. In their local communities, there is a lot of diversity, with many different kinds of personalities. The Church encompasses all races, colours, political opinions and classes. This inevitably makes for tension within the Church as all these different types strive to live in peace. St Paul calls upon them to put their differences aside because they are all part of one Body and thus should have the same care that one limb of the human body has for the others. That is, if one limb suffers the whole Body is in pain. And as a human body is animated by a human spirit, so it is with the Body of Christ; all in the Body have received the same Spirit in their baptism. Thus all have the same divine life, the same access to the Father, whatever their different social stations in the world. Thought of one Spirit leads St Paul to think of the age to come, that one and common hope to which we are all called – for the sacramental gift of the Holy Spirit is our participation in the powers of the age to come. Despite our differences, we are all called to the one Kingdom, one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism which are indissolubly linked. We are buried with Christ in the baptismal font and are resurrected with Him to everlasting life, to participate in the glory of the one God and Father of us all. We not only share membership in the same Body, the same sacramental gift of the Spirit; not only the same heavenly destination and earthly experience of the Lord in His Church, but we also share in the same Father Who is above all and through all and in you all. That is, He is the source of life of each one and of all the world. He is sovereign above all the world. He is through all, working His purposes in all creation. He is in all, the inner life of all who live. Since we all share the same life-giving Father, we are all brothers. With such things held in common, how can we not strive to walk together in peace? (4:4-6) But while the Church is one in essence, it is diverse in gifts and function. Unity does not mean uniformity. Each member is unique before God, with gifts and roles granted by Him for the maturity and stability of the Body. Though we are all one each one of us was given his own grace (his own task and function in the Body), measured out to us as Christ's Gift according to our capacity to receive it. These spiritual gifts are distributed by the Lord as part of the riches of His ascended glory and His Resurrection bounty to His people. (4:7)

*** * * GOSPEL * * ***

The Reading is from St Luke [12:16-21]

Then He spoke a parable to them saying: “The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. And he thought within himself, saying, ‘What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?’ So he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.’ ” But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?’ So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God. Then He said to His disciples, “Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; nor about the body, what you will put on.”

*** * *EXPLANATION * * ***

In this parable, Jesus distinguishes between material riches which suffer corruption and spiritual riches which abide eternally. The rich man is a fool, despite his material success, because he vainly puts all his trust in his possessions rather than God. To be “rich toward God” is to have a life of close communion with Him through faith and works. The rich man had prepared for a future life of leisure, but suddenly all was taken away by premature death. He made four mistakes – the same ones many of us make: (1) he tried to satisfy his soul only with material things; (2) he deceived himself into believing that he really owned all these possessions and did not consider that they were loaned to him from God and that he would have to give account of this surplus; (3) he completely ignored his obligations to his fellowman, not realizing what a blessing he might have been to others with all his treasures; and (4) he lived only for this life and made no provision for eternity. His God was his possessions. Covetousness is one of the worst species of idolatry. Before long, your possessions begin to possess you and you have no time for God. The tragedy was not in the rich man’s death, for he would have had to die regardless. The tragedy was, having to go before he found that the real aim of Christian life is communion and union with Christ. Although he was successful, God insists that he was foolish because he was pre-occupied with lesser things – that is, finding pleasure rather than finding purpose in his life; building his business rather than thinking about improving the condition of his soul; amassing great wealth for himself rather than assisting those in need. Despite his worldly success this man had lived only for himself. He had forgotten his neighbour. He had forgotten God. He had forgotten his real purpose in life. In all his efforts to get rich, he became terribly poor spiritually. He was successful by worldly standards, but what do we mean by success? Only God can proclaim who is successful or unsuccessful. And He tells us that the truly successful person is one who is rich in faith and love toward God and man and not to who has great wealth and fortune. The wealth that counts in God’s eyes is accumulated by a soul that has learned to pray; by a conscience that is clear; by a life that is dedicated to Him; by a soul that has received God’s forgiveness; by a person who believes that all we own is

given to us upon trust by God to be used not only for ourselves but also for those in need. Regrettably, those who have ample goods tend to be induced into a false sense of security. They do not need God; they do not need prayer. In fact, their “ample goods” make it difficult for them to contemplate death. Notice also Christ’s words, “they will require”. Like some stern impersonal officers demanding tribute, the fearsome angels will also ask for your soul, and you will not want to give it up because you love this life and claim the things of this life as your own. But they do not demand the soul of a righteous man because he himself, commits his soul into God’s hands with joy and gladness. Unfortunately, man stores up things without knowing for whom he gathers them. How can he not be called a fool who does not know that the length of a man’s life rests with God alone and that no man can set the limits of his own life. Let us therefore lay up treasure for ourselves in heaven so that we may not hear those frightful words, “Fool! This night your soul will be required of you....”