



GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AUSTRALIA

PARISH OF THE ANNUNCIATION OF OUR LADY, “EVANGELISMOS”

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SUNDAY 24 JANUARY 2016 “YOUR FAITH HAS MADE YOU WELL”

EPISTLE **The Reading is from Paul the Apostle to Timothy [1Timothy 1:15-17]** This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life. Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, honour and glory forever and ever.

EXPLANATION: St Paul quotes a “**faithful word**” or saying in his letter to Timothy that he commends as **worthy of all acceptance**, whose truth may be relied upon by all that **Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners**. That is, Christ came not simply to reward the righteous, but to restore, heal and save the worst sinners. He came to gather into His Kingdom all the children of men, including the tax collectors and prostitutes – even blasphemers and persecutors. Among such sinners, St Paul feels himself worse than all – “**of whom I am chief**”, ready to run to God in repentance. Why is it that St Paul had so much awareness of sin that he called himself the foremost of sinners? The answer is that our sense of sin is in proportion to our nearness to God. The closer we are to Him, the greater will be our awareness of how much we have failed Him and ourselves. The farther we are from Him the less will be our awareness of sin. The sense of sin is a measure of the soul’s awareness of God. It was

because of St Paul's closeness to Christ that he was able to see himself as the foremost of sinners. **(1:15)** That is why, St Paul reasons, he **received mercy**. As first among sinners and notorious for his persecution of the Church, he could provide the perfect paradigm and be a **pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life**. That is, to be a model for those who would later have faith in Jesus and seek salvation. In St Paul's case, Jesus could **show all long-suffering** or more clearly demonstrate the whole of His patience. The mercy shown to Paul the persecutor revealed that mercy can be obtained by anyone who will come to Jesus. If Paul could return to Christ and find such acceptance, there is no one beyond saving. Paul's conversion and apostolate remain as a beacon for the lost, a summons for all the sinners to come home and find a welcome. In saving Paul the Prodigal, Christ opened His heart and displayed His boundless compassion for all sinners everywhere. **(1:16)** This demonstration of mercy fills Paul's heart and says to Timothy that our salvation is not in the Mosaic Law, but in the boundless mercy of Jesus. Thinking of this, he bursts out in a liturgical cry of praise to God Who through Christ gave such mercy to the world – **"Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God Who alone is wise, be honour and glory forever and ever Amen."** **(1:17)** The greatest sin in the world today is that people have begun to lose their sense of sin. For example, the old sin of adultery is now seen as a means of personal gratification – an expression of freedom and love – and therefore not at all a sin but a virtue. Many say we have no sin and deceive themselves. (1John 1:8) They find the words of St Paul in today's Epistle most distasteful. But they don't realise that sin separates them from God and others and even from themselves. It dwells in them, controls them, makes them do what they don't want to do. It possesses them and holds them captive to the passions. When we see the supreme sacrifice Christ offered on the Cross to forgiveness, we begin to realise that sin is so serious as to require the

crucifixion of God. How can we then not say with St Paul, **“I am the foremost of sinners?”** A sense of sin can lead us either to despair or to God. St Paul says that it is meant to lead us to God, to forgiveness, peace and a new life that only He can give. There is something greater than sin – God’s grace. “Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.” (Romans 5:20) If Christianity talks much about sin, it is because it alone has the cure for sin. “I came into the world not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance,” said Jesus. The first words ever preached by Jesus dealt with the cure for sin – “Repent”! Make a change of mind, an about face, return to God Whom you have left, whom you have forgotten, Whom your sins have crucified. He will forgive you, and accept you, and give you the power to become a new person in Christ.

GOSPEL The Reading is from St Luke [18:35-43] Then it happened, as He was coming near Jericho, that a certain blind man sat by the road begging. And hearing a multitude passing by, he asked what it meant. So they told him that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by. And he cried out, saying, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” Then those who went before warned him that he should be quiet; but he cried out all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” So Jesus stood still and commanded him to be brought to Him. And when he had come near, He asked Him, saying, *“What do you want Me to do for you?”* He said, “Lord, that I may receive my sight.” Then Jesus said to him, *“Receive your sight; your faith has made you well.”* And immediately he received his sight, and followed Him, glorifying God. And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God.

EXPLANATION: A blind man sat by the road begging, and hearing the commotion asked what was going on? They told him, **“Jesus of Nazareth is passing by”**. And believing that Christ is the seed of David cried out, **“Son of David, have mercy on me!”** The bystanders tried to stop him; they rebuked him, **but he cried out all the more.** He was

persistent in his quest. And Jesus, hearing the cry of human sorrow stopped and healed him. The Lord said, **“Your faith has made you whole”**. For you have believed with faith that I am the Son of David, the Christ, Who is now revealed, and you have shown such zeal that you did not keep silent even when rebuked. Similarly Jesus hears all our prayers when we ask Him with faith. If the blind man had not prayed with faith, Jesus would have passed him by. How many times has Jesus passed us by because we did not ask Him to stop? How many needs are there in our lives that are not met simply because we have not fallen on our knees in humility and not prayed? But Jesus will not give us what we ask for if we do not make a good request. That is, if it is not good or profitable for our soul. The Blind man saw not only the light of day, but also the light of life – his spiritual sight. When we embrace Christ as our Lord and Saviour, He enables us to see things we never saw before. Such sight changes a man’s life. He lives no longer for the passing things of this world, but for the things that endure, that last unto eternity. Such sight requires a man to walk away from his beggar’s mat into the discipleship of Christ, away from prejudice into life of love and brotherhood, away from sin to a new life in Christ. When the blind beggar received his sight, **“he followed Jesus”**. He had enough of darkness. Now he would live in the presence of Him who was and is and will ever be **“the light of the world”**. Jesus continually knocks on the door of our hearts. He reveals Himself in the Bible. He speaks to us through the Church. He offers Himself to us through the Sacraments. He is always just a prayer away from us. But we remain inactive and He passes by unheeded. We fail to respond, to seize the opportunity that would have given us sight, light, happiness, joy and fulfilment beyond our highest expectation, leading on to eternal life. To miss Christ is to miss all. To gain Christ is to gain all. If you do not open the door of your heart you will shut Him out with your indifference and lose life’s greatest opportunity to invite Christ into your life. **(18:35-43)**