



GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AUSTRALIA

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SUNDAY 10 JULY 2016 – PUT YOUR FAITH IN GOD

EPISTLE: (Romans 5:1-10) Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love towards us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

EXPLANATION: Here St Paul urges the Jews not to be persuaded by those who say that faith is not enough and that to have peace with God and enjoy His glory on the Last Day, one must be circumcised. He says that **peace with God is found through our Lord Jesus Christ** (V1) not through circumcision. Christ alone is sufficient. It is through Him – without the necessity for further works such as circumcision that we now have **access by faith** (V2)

into that grace in which we stand. Now through the Cross, peace has been made between God and men. Through Him we can **boast in the hope of the Glory of God** (V2). And that is not all. St Paul urges us also to boast in our **tribulations** and persecutions for the sake of Christ, for those afflictions will lead us closer to that same hope. Our **tribulation produces perseverance** (V3). That is, the more we suffer for Christ, the more we learn the severe lessons of endurance and the more spiritually hardy we become. That **perseverance** in turn produces **character and character hope**. That is, the more we are tested, the more we prove our worth, as those who have come through the fire and passed the test. And the more we endure, the more we have reason to be filled with hope of the glory of God (V4). And that **hope will not disappoint** and put us to shame. Rather, what we hope for we will certainly obtain. How can we know this? **Because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit Who was given to us** in Baptism and Chrismation. When we were baptised God poured out His love into our hearts. (V5) So great is God's love that while we were still **weak** and helpless to save ourselves, **at the appointed time, Christ died for the unrighteous or ungodly**; the impious who lack the capacity to become righteous due to alienation from their Creator. He died on the Cross for us, impious and rebellious as we were, and brought us back to God. (V6) For Who would die for a righteous man let alone a sinner? Only Christ because of the immensity of His love for us. (V7) Yet there is more to be expected from the love. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more having been reconciled we will be saved by His life. That is, "life" refers to the life we receive from Him at the Eucharistic chalice and eternal life for those who love Him. They will escape the "**wrath**" of God directed against the rebellious on the Last Day because they have been **justified in His Blood and death**. (V8,9) And there is yet more. For **not only that** – not only do believers look to be saved from the wrath of the Last Judgment through their faith, not only do they boast of the future "hope and the glory of God", but they also **boast in God** and in what He has done for them **through our Lord Jesus Christ** now, in this age. Their reconciliation and standing with God is not just a future hope. It is also a present reality. (V10) How can anyone suggest that mere circumcision could add anything to that? The

Protestants in the 16th Century believed in “sola fides” – justification (salvation) by “faith alone”. This contradicts Scripture, which says: “faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead”. (James 2:17) It has been settled since the Apostolic era that salvation was granted by the mercy of God to righteous men and women. Those baptised into Christ were called to believe in him and do good works. Orthodoxy emphasizes it is first God’s mercy – not our faith – which saves us. For Orthodox Christians, faith is living, dynamic, continuous – never static. Faith is not something a Christian exercises only at one critical moment, expecting it to cover all the rest of his life. True faith is not just a decision, it is a way of life. This is why the modern Evangelical Protestant question, “Are you saved?” gives pause to an Orthodox believer. As the subject is addressed in Scripture, the Orthodox Christian would see it in at least 3 aspects: (1) I have been saved, being joined to Christ in baptism (2) I am being saved, growing in Christ through the sacramental life of the Church (3) I will be saved, by the mercy of God at the Last Judgment. The Kingdom of God is the enjoyment of all that is good. This comes through righteousness. The pagan worship of the **Gentiles** did not deliver them from earthly cares because it was focussed upon non-existent gods, that is, idols. Jesus calls us to look to heaven which will set us free from anxiety about earthly things. **“Seek first the Kingdom of Heaven and His righteousness and all things shall be added to you.”** (V33,34)

GOSPEL: (Matthew 6: 22-33) The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness! No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? So, why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of

these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you. O you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

EXPLANATION: Jesus refers to things within the reach of the senses so that we may more easily grasp His teachings. As the eye is the **lamp of the body**, so the mind (nous) is the spiritual eye of the soul. It illuminates the whole inner man. Keeping our mind pure is fundamental to a Christian life. If you fill your mind with worries over money, impure thoughts, etc, you extinguish the lamp and darken your soul. (V22,23) No man can serve two lords who command things that are opposed to each other. Such lords are God and mammon. We make the devil our lord and make the belly our god. People attempting to maintain an attachment to both earthly and heavenly things is impossible because both demand full allegiance. Jesus calls "**mammon**" a master, not because it is by nature evil, but because of the absolute and wretched servility it extracts. (V24) Jesus warns against severe anxiety and concern over money which drives man away from God. Physical growth and length of life is dependent upon God's providence – more than food, drink and clothing. Persistent anxiety over the things of this world demonstrates internal insecurity and a weak or superficial faith. Jesus warns us not to give ourselves over entirely to our cares and to neglect God. This means, will not He who gave what is greater, life itself, and fashioned the body, will He not also give us food and clothing? (V25) Are we more witless than birds who have instinctive knowledge for finding food? (V26) Even if we take the utmost care, we can do nothing if God does not will it. Why then do we drive ourselves to exhaustion with futile worries? (V27) Even though we go to great lengths, we are not able to adorn ourselves as beautifully as the lilies of the field. (V28,29) Therefore, one who beautifies himself is like grass. But you, He says, are creatures endowed with reason, whom God fashioned with both body and soul. Those of "little faith" are those who concern themselves with such thoughts. For if they had perfect faith in God, they would not give such anxious thoughts to these things. (V30) Luxury and excess are harmful to the soul. (V31,32)