



GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AUSTRALIA

PARISH OF THE ANNUNCIATION OF OUR LADY, “EVANGELISMOS”

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SUNDAY 9 OCTOBER 2016 – FEAR OF DEATH

EPISTLE The Reading is from Paul’s Second Letter to the Corinthians [2Cor 6:1-10] We then, as workers together with Him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For He says: *“In an acceptable time I have heard you. And in the day of salvation I have helped you.”* Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation. We give no offense in anything, that our ministry may not be blamed. But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God: in much patience, in tribulations, in needs, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in sleeplessness, in fastings; by purity, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by sincere love, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, by honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report; as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as chastened, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.

EXPLANATION:

Here St Paul pleads to the Corinthians to be reconciled with God by taking full advantage of the **grace** of Christ’s saving work. That is, the opportunity for salvation through Christ. He begs them not to waste this gift, which is available to everyone. God has offered knowledge of this grace to mankind through those who have continued Christ’s work through the ages. Inspired authors of Scripture, Fathers of the

Church whose writings preserve its intended meaning, priests, monks, theologians, teachers, parents and all who have really believed the Gospel have passed on the same urgent message – use life for its ultimate purpose to learn about God’s plan. That is, those who would like to live eternally with Him must try to live according to God’s plan in order to demonstrate faith and be rendered righteous. **(6:1)** Quoting Isaiah 49:8, St Paul relates that God helps us to fulfil life’s potential of union with Him by reaching out to each of us in an **“acceptable time”**. That is, in our lifetime – the time allotted to ponder and pursue salvation. We never know when this life will end and, therefore, this opportunity will end through death or the Second Coming of Christ, so the present day is the only one of which we can be certain. Therefore, the **“day of salvation”** is now, the present. Our chance to consciously commit or recommit our lives to Christ is now, for tomorrow may be too late. During the Divine Liturgy we are prompted often to “commend ourselves and one another and our whole lives to Christ our God.” These are valuable reminders of the purpose for life. **(6:2)** St Paul strives to set a good example of the Christian life in all ways so those observing his way of life will have no cause to reject the Gospel on his account. **(6:3)** In carrying our God’s work, St Paul says that we must endure all **trials and tribulations**, just as he willingly endured beatings, imprisonment and often went without adequate food and sleep. He stresses the discipline of fasting because it affords spiritual strength to be able to continue the struggle. **(6:4-5)** Through purity of heart, man acquires the gifts of the Holy Spirit, kindness and sincere love. St Paul attracted the grace of the Holy Spirit through his good works and toils and used these gifts to unite all believers to Christ. Those who use these gifts to bring glory or worldly gain to themselves misuse these gifts and cause divisions within the Church. Their proper use should be only for the glory of God and to promote unity within the Church. **(6:6)** The **power of God** is available through the Sacraments of the Church, which are

vehicles of grace. St Paul's effectiveness in his ministry stems from acting according to the **"word of truth"**, God's will, by which he clothes himself in the **"armour of righteousness"**. This advantage is accessible to all who develop, teach and live by an understanding of the fullness of the truths preserved by the early Church. **(6:7)** St Paul dealt with the extremes of life, as do all who sincerely try to live and teach the fullness of the Gospel. He was honoured by some, and dishonoured by others. But he warns that **"honour"** presents a particular danger to the recipient. It is difficult to accept praise humbly, in a Christ-like manner, and sincerely give all glory to God. The sin of pride will undo all the good that has been done, whereas humility adds to what we do not have. The Apostles were poor in worldly possessions yet rich spiritually and made many rich in that which really matters – knowledge of Christ. They lived as **"having nothing, yet possessed all things"**. They **rejoiced** in their sufferings because they had truly committed their lives to Christ and believed that through Him they could live eternally with God in His Kingdom if they endured to the end. **(6:8-10)**

GOSPEL **The Reading is from St Luke [7:11-16]** Now it happened the day after, that he went into a city called Nain; and many of His disciples went with Him, and a large crowd. And when He came near the gate of the city, behold, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the city was with her. When the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her and said to her, *'Do not weep.'* Then He came and touched the open coffin, and those who carried him stood still. And He said, *"Young man, I say to you, arise."* So he who was dead sat up and began to speak. And He presented him to his mother. Then fear came upon all, and they glorified God, saying, *"A great prophet has risen up among us";* and, God has visited His people.

EXPLANATION:

Here we see the widow walking behind her son's coffin on the way to the cemetery. Her hopes, her aspirations, her dreams were being buried in that coffin. As the procession was making its way through the city gates, another

procession met them there – Jesus, His disciples and a large crowd. The mother’s grief touched Jesus and He raised her son from the dead. This account shows Jesus’ compassion toward the mourning widow, and also manifests Christ’s divinity; that he is God and has power over life and death. As God visited His people then, so He visits us today to grant us hope and comfort in our sorrow. Because of Christ we never grieve as though what has happened to us or to our loved ones is the end of the story. It is not! The presence of Christ, the promise of the resurrection, the love of God from which nothing can separate us, the assurance of forgiveness, the confidence of eternal life, all mean hope. A hope that changes the very character of our grief. However, there are some people who think that by kissing a cross and receiving Holy Communion on their death-bed will make up for a life of sin. They forget that preparation for death does not begin on the death-bed. It begins as soon as we are born. A person cannot practise indifference to God all his life and suddenly be ushered by death into joyous fellowship with Him. Such a sudden, unpractised facing of God would result in anxiety, fear and torture rather than joy. However, for the person who walks with Christ every day, the final home going is somewhat of a glorified repetition of what he has been doing daily – entering into God’s presence. That is why we say that heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people. Death was never meant to fill us with fear. It was intended to give us a perspective for life; to help us live a better life. Therefore to avoid fear of death we must live each day the way we wish to die; the books balanced; the record clear; walking hand in hand with Jesus, the Lord of life and death. We must be forever mindful of death. If only we realised that this night might be the last moment in our life, we would be much more intense, much more attentive to the words we speak and the things we do. Those who believe in Jesus Christ and who have died and risen with Him in Holy Baptism are no longer slaves to the fear of death and its power, for through His death Jesus destroyed “him who has the power of death” and delivered “all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage”. (Hebrews 2:14-15) **(7:11-16)**