



## GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AUSTRALIA

### PARISH OF THE ANNUNCIATION OF OUR LADY, “EVANGELISMOS”

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### SUNDAY 18 JUNE 2017 – “COME FOLLOW ME”

#### **EPISTLE The Reading is from St Paul’s Letter to the Romans [2:10-16]**

.....but glory, honour and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God. For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law (for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified; for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them) in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.

**EXPLANATION:** Here St Paul says that both Jew and Greek will suffer the same judgment and the same fate at the Last Judgment. Each will be judged according to his good works regardless of race or religion. And in the same way, there will be “glory, honour and peace” in the Age to Come for “everyone who does righteousness.” The Jew will be judged first because he was given the more complete revelation of God’s eternal and visible nature and His righteous will. That is, he was given the Mosaic Law, which was written by God on tablets of stone and given to the Jews through

Moses. Then the Greek or Gentile will be judged too, as knowing these same truths the beauty of Creation. So, if the Greek **“works out the good”**, striving to serve God and do His will according to the light given to him, he too will receive the same reward, because **“there is no respect of persons with God”**. That is, God does not measure the Jew with any different moral yardstick than He does the Gentile, nor any special immunity from Judgment. The same standards, the same judgment, the same rewards apply equally to all. **(2:10-11)** The **“natural law”** has been written by God in the heart of every human person who has ever lived. This is the voice of the conscience. Therefore, all people, by nature are inspired and co-operate with God’s grace. So good deeds are natural to us, whereas evil deeds are contrary to nature. The presence of God’s law in our conscience condemns anything we do which is contrary to true human nature. Therefore, even Gentiles – people not under the Law of Moses, those who do not know of Christ – have an internal law from God, the natural law, **“written in their hearts”**, according to which God will judge them. Jews, then, have two laws from God, the Law of Moses and conscience – and are accountable to Him for both. St Paul says that, the Jews, who **“sinned in the Law”**, transgressing what God had forbidden in the Mosaic Law, will be judged through the Law and the natural law of the conscience, suffering for its violation, whereas the Gentiles who have **“sinned lawlessly”**, that is, without reference to the Jewish Law, will **“perish lawlessly”**, without reference to that Law. **(2:12-13)** The Gentiles may not have the Jewish Law, however, they can do by nature and instinctively the things of the Law, practising the piety, justice and compassion the Law enjoins. Thus, even not having the Law, they still are a **“law to themselves”** in the sense that their inner heart and conscience constitutes their version of the Jewish Law. For it is possible for Gentiles, observing the glories of creation, to have inner heart knowledge of the glorious Creator and to strive to serve Him. **(2:14)** The virtues of these righteous Gentiles demonstrate that the values and works of the Law are written in their hearts. The existence of this inner moral compass (as God’s natural law in the hearts of the Gentiles) is proven by the fact that their conscience bears witness to their deeds. Their righteous deeds witness to such an inner law within them, and so does their conscience – their reasoning sometimes accusing them (when they sin) or defending them

(when they act rightly). The verdicts of this inner tribunal of the conscience prove that they are not without a true moral compass, and it is this inward and spontaneous instinct that acts for them as the law does for the Jews. Even as believing Christians, we must not take the outcome of God's final judgment for granted. We must pray "for a good defence before the dreaded Judgment Seat of Christ", when we will all be judged for our thoughts, words and deeds. Nothing is more fearful than to hear the words of Christ, "get thee cursed into everlasting fire." There is no greater punishment than to be separated from Christ, our Panagia, the saints and our loved ones for all eternity. **(2:15-16)**

**GOSPEL** **The Reading is from the Gospel of St Matthew [4:18-23]** **And Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fisherman. Then He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." They immediately left their nets and followed Him. Going on from there, He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets. He called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him. And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people.**

**EXPLANATION:** These first disciples had already heard the preaching of John the Baptist, which prepared them to accept the Messiah immediately. Jesus chose men who were poor, uneducated peasants because they would more readily open their hearts and accept the Word of God and also to reveal to the world that by the Power of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost they are the wisest of all. **(4:18-21)** They immediately left their nets and followed Jesus. It appears that Zebedee did not believe and it was for this reason that his sons, James and John left him because he was an impediment to virtue. **(4:22)** Jesus then went into the synagogues to preach to the Jews

and to show them that He was not opposed to the Law, but had come to fulfil it. He begins with miracles to give credibility to what He teaches. **(4:23)** He reveals the deeper meaning of several Old Testament laws, broadening their implication. Jesus chose 12 men to follow Him as the inner circle of his workers. The number twelve is significant. Jesus wanted His men to represent the 12 New tribes of Israel that would spread the message of God. But He not only calls them, but also us. He has chosen us to be His people. Christ chooses us before we chose Him. He chooses us in Baptism before we were even aware of Him. But there comes a time when we must respond to His call – to follow Him. The call of Jesus is personal and requires a personal response; a personal commitment of our life to Him as Lord and Saviour. A Christian is one who follows Jesus and patterns his life after Him. Christ does not call us for what we are, for we are unworthy. He chooses us as we are, that is, sinners, impetuous and vacillating, broken and defeated. But He does not leave us in that state. He makes us new. He chooses us for what He can make of us. We came to Him greedy and He makes us generous. We came to Him impure and He has made us clean. He fills us with God's presence. We follow Jesus because He is the Truth, the Way and the Life; the Light of the world; the Bread of life, the Resurrection and the life; we belong to Him; He is our Creator, our Redeemer. He needs us to be His servants, His witnesses; to bring pardon where there has been injury; to help turn doubt into faith, to bring joy into lives consumed by sadness, to reflect His light in the darkness of futility. Following Christ brings true freedom. With God's grace we shake off the shackles of our passions which hold us captive to sin. But life in Christ is not easy. Following Christ requires one to take up his cross and to deny the desires and pleasures of the world. Our aim is not to find something that is easy, but something that gives us true peace, joy and happiness; something worth living for, and only Christ can give us that. It will cost us something, for it cost Him everything. But it will cost a lot more to make our way through this world without Him, and then, at last, when we come to the end of the road discover that we have nothing.