



GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AUSTRALIA

PARISH OF THE ANNUNCIATION OF OUR LADY, “EVANGELISMOS”

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SUNDAY 7 OCTOBER 2018 – FEAR OF DEATH

EPISTLE The Reading is from St Paul’s Second Letter to the 2Corinthians [11:31-33,12:1-9]

The God and Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. In Damascus the governor, under Aretas the king, was guarding the city of Damascenes with a garrison, desiring to arrest me; but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped from his hands. It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord: I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago – whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows – such a one was caught up to the third heaven. And I know such a man – whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows – how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. Of such a one I will boast; yet of myself I will not boast, except in my infirmities. For though I might desire to boast, I will not be a fool; for I will speak the truth. But I refrain, lest anyone should think of me above what he sees me to be or hears from me. And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, *“My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.”* Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

EXPLANATION: Here, the Corinthians thought they were wise enough to evaluate Church leaders. They disparaged Paul, seeing him as a weakling without credentials. Using his opponents' level of argument, Paul lists his Jewish and Christian credentials to show them that if genealogy is so important to them, no one can compare with his "Christian experience". That is, his sufferings; his compassionate, involved concern for his people and even his bizarre adventures one of which was his escape from Damascus by being let down in a basket through a window. **(11:32-33)** He endured a shipwreck; spent many days in prisons; five times he received 40 stripes; beaten with rods; stoned; left in the wilderness; perils in cities; hunger and thirst; in nakedness etc. He possessed total love for God and dedication to Christ, factors which qualified him for his task but which also made him vulnerable to intensive attacks by Satan, who wanted to curtail his mission of bringing the Gospel to the Gentiles. Because Paul's opponents probably boasted of "**visions and revelations**", he resigns himself to relate to them a supernatural experience that he would normally not share with anyone because of the dangers of falling into the sin of pride. He does so now only to a limited degree, to establish, without a doubt, his authority as an Apostle. **(12:1)** He begins as though speaking about someone else. **Fourteen years ago** would date the event before his missionary journeys around 41AD. He was transported to the "**third heaven**", a Jewish expression for the highest heaven, Paradise, where God is surrounded by all the heavenly hosts. During this experience God revealed great mysteries to him, but even he did not know whether he was in his body or out of it at the time. **(12:2)** God gave Paul this experience because he was chosen for his ministry after Christ had ascended, and so had not been taught by Him in person. Paul speaks of having heard that which he could not reveal, just as St John the Evangelist was not allowed to write what the seven thunders had uttered in Revelations 10:4. As Jesus told Nicodemus, God does not reveal His mysteries to the worldly man because they are beyond his comprehension. (John3:12) **(12:4)** Because he had this experience by "**going out of himself**", he is not misleading the Jews by saying it

happened to someone else. He resists the temptation to embellish facts to bring glory to himself, relating only what is necessary to establish his right to try to guide the Corinthian Christians. He wants to lead them to worship God, not him. **(12:5)** The visions and revelations Paul experienced gave him spiritual wisdom and power, but the difficulties that God allowed Satan to bring to Paul's life was to remind him and all who learn of his life and work that he was a human being, as dependent on God as everyone else. Paul sees his **"thorn in his flesh"** was given to him precisely so he might not be **"exalted"**. St John Chrysostom and most Greek Fathers assert that this thorn was not a physical problem but a vulnerability to his enemies; those who tried to thwart his work and had him beaten, imprisoned and living under the constant threat of death. **(12:6)** Paul pleaded for God to deliver him from his torment but was told that his "thorn" would remain with him, so that it would be clear that his accomplishments could have been achieved only with divine assistance. That is, the power of Christ remains in him because of his weakness.**(12:8-9)**

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 homegoing 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)**