



## GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AUSTRALIA

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

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### SUNDAY 17 FEBRUARY 2019

**EPISTLE** **The Reading is from St Paul’s Second Letter to Timothy [3:10-15]** But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra – what persecutions I endured. And out of them all the Lord delivered me. Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

**EXPLANATION:** The major theme of this Epistle by Paul to his beloved disciple Timothy who was ordained bishop in Ephesus is about following Paul’s teachings (“**doctrines**”) and overcoming hardship in the ministry. He emphasizes that, ordained ministers should utilize their spiritual gifts in the Church to keep and pass on her living tradition. Through living tradition – the Bible and the ongoing life of the Holy Spirit in the body of Christ – the Church remains essentially as she was at her inception. He encourages Timothy to follow the example of his life (“**follow my manner of life**”) which exhibits what Christ taught. **(3:10)** Paul reveals that life in Christ elicits countless persecutions. He explains that, while union with Christ brings love, joy and peace, it also brings the world’s hatred and **persecution**. The world hates Christians because they do not know the Father. A person cannot say he loves God but not God’s Son, for those

who hate Christ also hate the Father; and hatred for Christ is without legitimate cause for He brings God's love and truth to the world. Christ says, "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you." (John 15:18) "If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you." (John 15:20) **(3:11)** The righteous and godly in Christ will suffer persecution. **(3:12)** And **"evil men and imposters will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived."** That is, the devil incites divisions among people so that they are deceived. These deceptive miracles and wonders through Satanic power will fool the unrighteous into following Satan. **(3:13)** Having exhorted Timothy with the example of his own steadfastness, Paul now issues a reminder of the depth of Timothy's training, which combined both oral and written instruction (that is, Tradition and the Old Testament Scriptures), which Timothy has been acquainted with from childhood and which **"make him wise for salvation"**. **(3:14-15)** The Bible is the living, actual Word of God. When you read the Bible, you are not just reading something which God spoke to others in the dim and distant past. God is speaking to you now. When you read the Scriptures you are actually in contact with God. He is speaking to you as a loving Father. Most books inform and a few reform. The Bible alone informs, reforms and transforms. It informs us about Jesus, the Son of God Whom to know is eternal life. It reforms us for in it we find the ideal and the standard by which we ought to live. It transforms us because in it we are brought face to face with the grace and power of Christ by which all things are made new. "It finds you." This is the power of the Gospel for salvation. It finds you in your wrong doings and convicts you of sin. It finds you in your loneliness and brings you the companionship of God. It finds you in your need and brings the divine answer to the need. Regrettably, we are not giving the Word of God a chance to find us. If only we could hear Him? From childhood we have known the Holy Scriptures which are able to make us wise for our salvation, but we don't take time and effort to study them, to engage in conversation with God. The Bible is God's blueprint for salvation. He wishes to enter into the most intimate possible relationship of love with us. He delivers the proposal to us through His Word. He expects a response. Our eternal destiny depends on our response. His earnest longing for reconciliation, fellowship and union

with us is made known in the Scriptures. They are not written to remain unopened. So take the time to read them and discover God!

**GOSPEL:** The Reading is from St Luke [18:10-14] Two men went up to the Temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax-collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, *“God, I thank you that I am not like the other men – extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week, I give tithes of all that I possess.”* And the tax-collector, standing a far off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast saying, *“God be merciful to me a sinner”*. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

**EXPLANATION:** The Pharisee prayed, gave tithes, he was not an extortioner, nor unjust, nor an adulterer, so why did Jesus condemn him? Because of his self-righteousness and self-exaltation. He prayed with pride, **“thus with himself”** and not to God. **(18:11)** He told God how virtuous and righteous he was. He depended on God for nothing. He did not consider himself a sinner because he had complied with the Mosaic Law. He did not ask for mercy or forgiveness. Finally, and worst of all, he declared his scorn of the Publican and thus was guilty of judging another. He believed himself to be just and the Publican a sinner. He neglected the weightier matters of the law – such as love, humility and repentance and not to judge others. The tax-collector’s posture and words express his deep humility and contrition. He acknowledged his total dependence on God, his sinfulness and his need for God’s mercy. That’s why he was **“justified”** – that is, forgiven and made right with God. He was exalted because of his humility which brought him close to God. **(18:11-14)** Similarly, we must not have an unChristian feeling of superiority, of being a better Christian than others, or judging the sincerity of our fellows, soliciting the praise of others by making it known that we follow the fast in every detail and worse, pretending to fast when we do not, making sure our fellow Christians know how much we give – these are the habits of the modern Pharisee. We must do things with love and humility so as to be transformed and conformed to the pattern given to us by Christ Himself. We must ask God for His mercy just as the Publican did. He had nothing to

trust in but the mercy of God. He looked nowhere but to God's mercy for help – **“God be merciful to me, a sinner”**. (18:13) How often during the Divine Liturgy we repeat the prayer of the Publican: “Lord, have mercy!” The Jesus Prayer, the prayer of the heart, is nothing more than an adaption of the Publican's prayer – ‘Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me a sinner.’ And the miracle is that there is mercy. At the very heart of the universe beats God's love. God's mercy is greater than anything we can imagine. This is why we say The Jesus Prayer so often. This prayer uttered with the least particle of faith, will open the way for God's forgiveness and for the coming of His Kingdom in our hearts. Jesus ceaselessly purges the passion of pride more than any other because self-love, arrogance and vainglory all stem from this root. When a man ascribes his accomplishments to himself, and not to God, he denies God and judges and condemns his fellow man. Therefore, Jesus opposes this passion which is opposed to Him, and through this parable He instructs those who trust in themselves that **“for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but those who humble themselves will be exalted”**. (18:14) Therefore, we must always rely on Christ's mercy, love and forgiveness. We must refrain from attributing our accomplishments to ourselves, as something done by our own strength, for Jesus says, “Without Me you can do nothing”. (John 15:5). We must consider ourselves the least of all men and consciously look upon ourselves as ants or worms, so that we can become God's children, formed by God. The lower we descend, the higher we ascend; and when we regard ourselves as nothing before God, then imperceptibly we will grow great. And when we begin to realize that we have nothing and know nothing, then we will become rich in the Lord through practice of the virtues and spiritual knowledge. Therefore, we must strive through virtue and purity to keep ourselves unsullied. For we know from what height Lucifer fell on account of his pride. We must not dream up great ideas about ourselves and suffer the same fate. We must regard ourselves as dust and ashes, or as refuse and lament continuously, for it is only on account of God's inexpressible compassion and kindness that we are called to communion and kinship with Him. For every proud heart is unclean in the Lord's eyes, and “the Lord resists the proud but gives grace to the humble”. (Ps 3:34)