



GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AUSTRALIA

PARISH OF THE ANNUNCIATION OF OUR LADY, “EVANGELISMOS”

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SUNDAY 5 JANUARY 2020 – SUNDAY BEFORE EPIPHANY

EPISTLE **The Reading is from St Paul’s Second Letter to Timothy [4:5-8]** But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfil your ministry. For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.

EXPLANATION: The major theme of today’s Epistle to his beloved spiritual son, Timothy, who he had left in Ephesus as bishop or overseer, is one of overcoming hardship in the ministry. Paul wrote this letter in 65-67AD, when he was chained, suffering and near his execution. He had been a prisoner in Rome for some time, without any hope of acquittal. He knows his end is at hand and he longs to see Timothy once more. He urges Timothy to continue in perseverance and purity. He knows Timothy will face apostasy and harassment within the Church once he’s gone and also contamination from the outside from those who wilfully reject law and morals out of love of self and love of pleasure. He warns Timothy that a great decay in morals will even infiltrate the Church. His “beloved son” will now fight the “**good fight**” without Paul’s

earthly guidance. He tells Timothy that he has already been “**poured out as a drink offering**”, that is, sacrificed himself to preach the Gospel and soon his mission will be at an end. A “drink offering” is a wine, water, or oil offering poured over animal or grain sacrifices at the conclusion of both Jewish and pagan rites. The “race” is the life and work that God gave Paul. The comparison of the spiritual life to an athletic contest is common in the writings of the ascetic Fathers. Paul shows the proper use of ascetic practice in the life of faith. They are valuable not in themselves, but for the sake of the goal of salvation. As training prepares an athlete, so spiritual discipline prepares a Christian to exercise faith and enter the kingdom. “Run in such a way that you may obtain this prize,” says St Paul. (1Cor 9:24) and God will grant to those who win the struggle (the good fight) the crown of righteousness, everlasting life with Him and all the saints and angels in the Kingdom of Heaven. Paul was martyred under Emperor Nero about 67AD. Because he was a Roman citizen, he was beheaded which is a faster way to die, whereas St Peter, a Jewish citizen, was crucified and died a slow painful death. Paul had great purpose in his life. He found it at the feet of Christ. Before the road to Damascus, Paul had no mission, no purpose. When he found Christ he found joy and peace despite all his sufferings. It is a peace that defies all understanding. Life is viewed as being empty and meaningless by many great thinkers who do not believe in God. Those who have not been illuminated by the truth of God consider life as a “walking shadow”, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing, a drama of unrelated moments with no sense or purpose (Shakespeare). To exist is the portion of every person, but life in all its fullness belongs only to those who have been united to Christ. Without Christ life is a hopeless end; with Christ it is an endless hope. Life has meaning, a direction, a value; that no suffering is lost, that every tear counts and each drop of blood; and the secret of living in today’s troubled world is found in the simple phrase of St John the Evangelist, “God is life, God is love.” The sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to those who love Him. Despair comes not because the

going gets hard, but because we doubt that the going means anything. With Christ the going for St Paul: "I have finished the race....now there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness," means everything. It has meaning, because loving and serving Christ was his all-consuming mission in life, his life had such great meaning that he overlooked all his sufferings and fears and looked forward to eternal life with Christ as his reward for keeping the faith.

GOSPEL **The Reading is from the Gospel of St Mark [1:1-8]** **The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in the Prophets: "*Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You. The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make His paths straight.'*"** John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair and with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. And he preached, saying, "There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandals strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose. I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

EXPLANATION: The "beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ", refers to the opening events of the ministry of Jesus, namely, the preparatory activity of John the Baptist, who was the last of the prophets. For the end of the Old is the beginning of the New Testament. The testimony concerning the Forerunner is taken from two prophets. "**Behold, I send My angel before Thy face, who shall prepare Thy way before Thee,**" is from Malachi(3:1). "**The voice of one crying in the wilderness.....**", is from Isaiah (40:3). Here God the father is speaking to God the Son, calling the Forerunner an "**angel or messenger**" because of John's angelic way of life, who has chosen to prepare the souls of the Jews to accept Christ. Hearts are

softened to receive the Light. He did this by baptizing. **“Before Thy face”** means that God’s messenger (angel) will be close to Jesus, showing the kinship of the Forerunner to Christ. **“The voice of one crying in the wilderness”** refers to the desolate condition of the Jewish souls which were like a desert. The “way” is the New Testament, the sacred story of the life, death and Resurrection of Christ, the Good News of Salvation in the Kingdom of God. The “paths” are the Old Testament which was well trodden. The Jews needed to be prepared for the way, the New Testament, and they also needed to make straight the Old Testament paths which they had once followed but which they had turned away and become wayward. **(1-3)** The baptism of John did not bestow the forgiveness of sins but instead only led mankind to repentance. Only Christ can forgive sins. St Mark writes, **“the baptism of repentance unto the remission of sins”**, that is, John’s preaching led to the remission of sins, He proclaimed the baptism of repentance so that those who repent and receive Christ in the Holy Sacrament of Baptism would have forgiveness of sins. **(1:4-5)** **“All the land of Judea...went out to him”** indicates the sweeping impact of the ministry of John the Baptist. John’s clothing is similar to that of Elijah (2Kings 1-8) indicating he fulfils the prophecy of Elijah’s return. John’s clothing was a symbol of mourning, for the prophet is showing that he who repents must mourn for his sins. The food that John ate certainly showed his self-control, for the passions of the body must be subdued, if the soul is to ascend to spiritual heights. **(1-6)** All those who came and were baptized by John, by their repentance were loosed from the bond of their sins when they later believed in Christ. Of all these, John loosed the sandals and the bonds of their sins. But he was not able to loose the sandals of Jesus, because he found no sin in Him. John baptized with water, but Jesus baptizes with the Holy Spirit, which means that only Christ, the Son of God, fully possesses and gives the Spirit. So to receive the Spirit we must be baptized in Christ and adopted as children of God. In adoption, Christians become anointed ones and heirs to the Kingdom of Heaven. **(1:7-8)**.