

The Lion

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March 2017

THE ONTOLOGICAL OUTCOME OF LENT

The Very Rev'd Fr. James Rooney

“MAN'S ONTOLOGICAL CONTENT” develops organically in the measure of his participation in the fullness of the Energies of his Maker.” [Fr. Zacharias Zacharou, *The Hidden Man of the Heart*, pp. 23]

AT FIRST READ, this statement might perplex the casual reader, but its emphasis cannot be dismissed. If one notes the use of the word “ontological,” it is used, not as some obscure, irrelevant theological term reserved for scholars and the Seminaries, but as a term which relates to each of us and which defines the goal of our Lenten combat, if not of our human existence.

The word, “ontological” derives from Greek, from a stem which means “to be.” Hence, “ontology” is what we say about “being.” This, of course, refers to reality, and since “reality,” in its utmost “form” is God, then “ontology” refers to what we say about being in its ultimate sense, to “Being.” Apply this concept to man, and two aspects of the definition become clear: first, the reality of God MUST be a part of the definition of any understanding of “ontology,” and second, man’s “ontology” participates in that ultimate reality, i.e., in

God. To define man’s ontology is to define him in relation to God.

Consequently, when we seek God, we are, in reality, seeking our own fulfillment. Man’s “ontological content” is the degree to which he is conformed, inwardly and outwardly, to the image and likeness of God.

The goal of our Lenten combat, then, is ontological. It is directed at the transformation of our beings, and the increase of their receptivity to the Divine Life. For example, increased prayer during Lent is intended to increasingly open us to God. Almsgiving is intended to alter our perspective from self-absorption to focus upon the needs of others, and thus opens us to God. Our repentance and confession is done with the intention of cleansing and altering the Temples of our minds, hearts and bodies, so that the Divine Life may abide there. Our application of ourselves to fulfillment of the Lenten combat is done with the specific intent of opening ourselves to God, if only for a season [although each Lent should be a precursor to a deeper stage of Christian existence].

We engage a Lenten discipline in order to alter ourselves, to participate with Divine Grace to “develop” our beings. This is done, not only by what we do, but by how we open ourselves to the Divine Life. When we successfully take these steps, the Lord fills us with Himself and manifests Himself in and through our beings. Thus a measure of ontological change is attained.

This is the purpose of our Lenten combat. If WE change, the world is changed, creation is changed, and because God is involved, in us and through us, He is manifested to that world, through us.

As we progress through our Lenten work, it is easy to lessen our discipline or our resolve. However, the outcome of our discipline is only achieved when we see it to completion, that is, to the celebration of the Resurrection. It is important for us that we not slacken in our efforts. We should be reminded of the words of Simon of Cyrene in the movie, “The Passion of the Christ.” In one of

the moments when Christ fell under the weight of the cross, Simon encourages him, “You’re almost there.”

From any point in the Lenten struggle, we should remember that we are almost at the end. It is important, therefore, to regularly apply ourselves more diligently to the struggle. We should review our Lenten Rules to be reminded of our personal goals, and maybe even increase our discipline a bit [don’t do it without consulting your priest, but DO consider it]. This too, is ontological.

We are not just “doing” in Lent; we are participating in God. The end of this participation is our own human fulfillment, and the fulfillment of creation through us. This is the achievement of our “ontological content,” and what we are striving for in Lent.

USING OUR PRAYER BOOKS

Bishop ANTHONY

Of the Diocese of Toledo and the Midwest which includes more than 45 churches and missions in Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio, and Wisconsin.

IF I WERE TO OFFER TO CONDUCT the London Symphony Orchestra not really knowing the movements and melodies, the timing and talents of the musicians, even Beethoven’s Ode to Joy, might make the people cry for the wrong notes struck and the mistakes made. Even an exquisite artistic achievement like that finds the sour note when someone who does not know what he is doing tries to present it.

Our prayer books have all kinds of prayers: prayers taken from Psalms in the Bible, prayers that Jesus taught Himself, prayers of the Apostles and holy fathers who knew exactly how to pray and what to pray for. That’s why when we use these prayers, prayers for all occasions of our lives, in the collection in our prayer books, we will strike just the right chord for what we want God

to hear from us, and the music of our message will harmonize with the heavenly melodies God hears all the time. Our needs will get through, and God will listen carefully.

I may have been well intentioned when I thought I could conduct the classics with the use of the London Symphony Orchestra, but even all that expertise and talent couldn’t help me. I need training. So it is with prayer. We need to know what to pray for, how to pray, what is needed before we start to pray. The great desert fathers said prayer is the highest form of art and the hardest to master. We have to leave out all the noise and confusion, the cares and anxieties that usually preoccupy our thoughts. We have to stand quietly in God’s presence, ready to listen to Him after He hears our prayer. It would be hard to carry on more than one conversation at a time on the phone. Yet, if we reflect for a moment, we expect God to give us all His attention when our attention, in our thoughts, even when we are praying, is scattered all around. We have to put Him on “call waiting”. Often we are forced to say “God, can you call later, then we can talk without all these interruptions.”

The set prayers in our prayer books take the guess work out of prayer. We can trust that the words and feelings, the thoughts and devotion, contained in those beautiful prayers are godly, because they were composed under the grace of the Holy Spirit by holy men and women who, themselves, were full of grace. Let these prayers teach us to pray for our own needs.

That’s also the point. People always complain God does not hear their prayers. I believe He does hear their prayers, but He knows when and how to answer them. Because sometimes we ask and pray for the wrong things. St James, in his New Testament letter says, “You ask and you do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.” (4:3). Sometimes what we need for our salvation is the exact opposite of what we ask for. It’s a good thing God does not give us everything we want. Experience tells us in many ways we are

thankful, as we look back on things, that God was wise enough not to answer our prayer in all the particulars we thought we needed at that time.

Let prayer be a conversation with God. We need to get to know Him. We should spend some time with Him. Then we will know what best to say and do and request. That's what that little red pocket prayer book is for. Use it with hope and reverence; it's God's personal and private phone number He gives only to those who are close to Him!

Some Collects From the Season of Lent

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, who hast made, and dost forgive the sins of all those who are penitent: create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of thee, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness. Through Jesus Christ...

OLORD, who for our sake didst fast forty days and forty nights: give us grace to use such abstinence, that, our flesh being subdued to the Spirit, we may ever obey thy godly motions in righteousness and true holiness, to thy honour and glory. Who livest...

PREVENT us, O Lord, we beseech thee, in all our doings with thy most gracious favour, and further us with thy continual help: that all our prayer and work may be begun, continued and ended in thee...

ALMIGHTY God, who seest that we have no power of ourselves to help ourselves: keep us both outwardly in our bodies, and inwardly in our souls; that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul. Through Jesus Christ thy Son...

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, who, of thy tender mercy towards mankind, hast sent thy Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ, to take upon him our flesh, and to suffer death upon the Cross, that all mankind should follow the example of his great humility: mercifully grant; that we may both follow the example of his patience, and also be made partakers of his Resurrection. Through the same Jesus Christ thy Son, our Lord: Who liveth and reigneth with thee, in the unity of the Holy Ghost, ever one God, through out all ages, world without end. *Amen.*

SCHEDULE OF PARISH LITURGIES AND EVENTS FOR GREAT LENT

The St. Mark's Vestry will host the Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper on February 28th at 6 PM. Everyone in the parish is invited to attend. Please sign the "RSVP" sheet in the parish hall if you are planning to come.

Ash Wednesday is March 1st with Mass & Imposition of Ashes at 7:00 AM, 12 Noon, and 6:00 PM.

Please SIGN UP TO HOST A LENTEN SUPPER at SMP beginning at 6 PM on Friday, March 3rd with Stations of the Cross according to the St. Ambrose Prayer Book following at 6:30 PM. This plan will continue to the 7th of April in Passion Week.

The Men's Lenten Retreat is sponsored by St. George Orthodox Cathedral on March 10-12th at Victoria, Kansas. The speaker will be Fr. Calinic Berger, from St. Nicholas Cathedral in Los Angeles. He will give talks on "King David and his Struggles: A Guide to a Spiritual Life." Tuition is \$150.00 and you may call 316-636-4676 to register.

Church Women Shamassy Kristine Woolley, Kathryn Reeves and Shirley Riemensnider will be our hostesses at a St. Patrick's Day Fund-raiser Luncheon on Sunday, March 26th. The proceeds will go to the Antiochian Women's Service Project which the theme is called "Strengthening the Ministries of our Church."

Confessions are normally heard on Saturday from 10 AM to 12 Noon and at other times during the week as convenient. The council given during Confession comes with no assurance as to scientific competence and is not advertised to treat or cure any disease of body, heart, soul, or mind. Lord have mercy



Mah-rya Proper wrote: "Here is a picture of the group gathered to craft together. It was a great opportunity to get together and get the word out about the church."

PSALM 119 AS A GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL GROWTH IN LENT

T01 Tools of the Spiritual Life, 2017 series.

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Welcome to this new series of podcasts for the Year of Grace 2017. This is the first of eight talks which shall be published each Friday during Septuagesima and Lent, concluding with Friday of the 5th Week of Lent, that is, Friday in Passiontide. There are many reasons for choosing this particular Psalm. (I suppose the least important is that it is a special favorite of mine.) I do think it is a fine example of the great literary skill found in the Psalms, but most importantly it illustrates how the psalms are the context for our liturgical worship and how they provide a teaching and guiding rule for our continued *theosis*.

THIS FIRST TALK is going will give you some facts about Hebrew poetry, an overview of how this psalm has been used in the Church throughout the ages, and other information applying to the whole psalm that will be helpful as we go through the different sections in the following weeks. Next week, the week of Sexagesima, we will consider the first four sections, then for each following week we will consider the next three sections of the psalm, which will allow us to conclude on Friday of Passion Week.

One particular tool which we should have at hand before us is the four senses in which Holy Scripture can be understood:

1. Historical (or literal) - the meaning of the words themselves.
2. Allegorical – the meaning that is hidden in the text.
3. Tropological - the moral lessons which can be drawn from the text.
4. Anagogical – pointing toward the end times, the Coming of Christ. As Cassian says, one and the same Jerusalem can be taken in four senses:
 - a. historically as the city of the Jews;
 - b. allegorically as Church of Christ,

- c. tropologically, as the soul of man, which is frequently subject to praise or blame from the Lord under this title,

- d. anagogically as the heavenly city of God “which is the mother of us all,”

Psalm 119 is titled in some modern translations as “On the Excellence of God’s Will.” With the aid of a very fine modern commentary by Dom Konrad Shaefer, OSB we shall explore this. According to Dom Konrad, law, according to the way it and its synonyms are used in the Books of Moses (and in the psalm we are considering) means wisdom or God’s will. It represents an understanding of law akin to the regula of several ancient monastic traditions, the most well-known of these is the Rule of Saint Benedict, it refers to a balanced order of human life. Law is a handrail which steadies and guides a person to walk rightly, and it also represents divine revelation. Like the Torah, the first five books of the Bible, which recounts God’s marvelous acts and regulates human conduct to effect salvation, the law embraces all the movements of human life with God. God’s law, an expression of His will, expresses perfection, and the Poet (David) gives shape to this sense in the composition of Psalm 119.

This insight which is so well stated by Dom Konrad has been, as it were, the underpinning of all aspects of our life and worship. Civil laws, church canons, rubrics, all of these are ordered to helping us progress in our growth in holiness as willed by the Father.

This psalm is an acrostic poem, that is one which uses the alphabet as an ordering principle for the structure of the work. Some other acrostic psalms are 9-10; 25; 34; 111; 112; and 145. This psalm is made up of 22 strophes, each of which are eight verses long, thus we have one strophe for each letter of the Hebrew alphabet. In alphabetical order the poet composes strophes of eight verses, the first verse of each strophe starts with the next letter in the alphabet and, in addition, each verse is initialized with the same letter.

Every verse contains the word law (torah, 25 times) or a synonym. This must have taken not only great skill but great patience on the part of the poet, whom we can assume to be David.

I can imagine David sitting at his desk, night after night, laboring to craft each strophe to the perfection which we see in the completed psalm. Nor of course, should we fail to acknowledge the grace of God which inspired and sustained him. Nonetheless, God intends us to “work out our salvation in fear and trembling” which means that we must expect to put at least that much intelligence and effort into our theosis as we unhesitatingly put into our work or play.

In any event, the theological content of Psalm 119 is evident in the well-ordered structure; “law” is pervasive and all-inclusive. It is interesting and important to note that this carefully designed structure does not include thoughts or elements which are carried over from one strophe to another. Each strophe can stand alone as a beautiful prayer praising some aspect of God’s law. (This is not any sort of new insight!). Psalm 119 has always been used in the so-called little hours of the Office: Prime, Terce, Sext, and None. The three or four strophes for one of these offices does not leave the worshipper wondering what comes next as he reaches the end of the appointed portion of the psalm.

The various strophes have different themes and some are shaded by mood and plot. There are several motifs of personal complaint, (see verses 81-88 for an example) and this suggest strongly the trials of the poet composing the psalm. Emotions do ebb and flow throughout the whole of the work, suggesting the drama of a menacing enemy. While direct references to Israel’s history, including the legal corpus and the covenant, the word “meditate” appears at least six times. This word in Hebrew urges the disciple of wisdom to linger upon and vocally repeat the torah repeatedly. According to Dom Konrad, this monotonous structure is intended to help the reader ruminate and thus enable him or her



to fully appreciate the torah – the law – the revealed Will of God and apply it to daily life. The tireless incantation fosters a contemplative climate which softens the heart and opens it to wisdom. The poet interiorizes God’s will with meditation and love.

This exegesis serves well to lay out for us the first of the four different senses of Holy Scripture for this psalm: the literal sense. In general, modern exegesis restricts itself to only the literal meaning. It generally does this well, but we do well to remember that this is only the start of how we are to react and respond to Holy Writ.

I think that now you are gaining some insight about why I chose this particular psalm as my Lenten guide and work. In his Rule, St Benedict says in Chapter 49 the following advice about the keeping of Lent:

Although the life of a monk ought to have about it at all times the character of a Lenten observance, yet since few have the virtue for that, we therefore urge that during the actual days of Lent the brethren keep their lives most pure and at the same time wash away during these holy days all the negligences of other times. And this will be worthily done if we restrain ourselves from all vices and give ourselves up to prayer with tears, to reading, to compunction of heart and to abstinence.

During these days, therefore, let us increase somewhat the usual burden of our service, as by private prayers and by abstinence in food and drink. Thus everyone of his own will may offer God “with joy of the Holy Spirit” (1 Thess. 1:6) something above the measure required of him. From his body, that is he may withhold some food, drink, sleep, talking and jesting; and with the joy of spiritual desire he may look forward to holy Easter.

Let each one, however, suggest to his Abbot what it is that he wants to offer, and let it be done with his blessing and approval. For anything done without the

permission of the spiritual father will be imputed to presumption and vainglory and will merit no reward. Therefore let everything be done with the Abbot's approval.

Also, in Chapter 48, the Rule provides:

On the days ... Lent they shall each receive a book from the library, which they shall read straight through from the beginning. These books are to be given out at the beginning of Lent.

Now before we delve deeper into the verses of this psalm, let's first consider the actual title it has in Holy Scripture. In both the Septuagint and the Vulgate translations as well as in our King James Version, this is "Alleluia." The Venerable Bede (672 – 735 A.D.), tells us this:

ALLELUIA is prefixed to this Psalm which is also very full of divine things so that the merit of the song may be recognized by the honour of the title. In the Hebrew letters it is set forth for the instruction of the unlearned and teachable peoples of Christ in such order that every set of eight verses begins with a different letter, wherein I think that the mystery of the Resurrection and of the true Circumcision is set forth. Josephus in his books of Antiquities states that this Psalm, and the 145th, and the Song of Deuteronomy, were composed in elegiac metre: no doubt because the former verse consist of six feet, and the latter, less by one, ends in a pentameter. Throughout the whole Psalm the universal choir of the Saints speaks, whether they be those who were from the beginning of the world, who are now, or are expected to be hereafter; amongst whom are found Apostles, Prophets, Martyrs, Confessors, Bishops, Priests, Deacons and Clerics, and all who serve the Lord in holy chastity as monks and nuns. Because then under each letter the things which follow should be understood according to its meaning, there for the first letter *Aleph* is rightly interpreted Doctrine, wherein eternal blessedness is promised to the undefiled in the way of the Lord¹.

This brings us to the end of this talk. Next week we shall consider the first four sections of Psalm 119, verses 1-8, 9-16, 17-24, & 25-34. (These begin with the Hebrew letters Aleph, Beth, Gimal, and Dalet, the first four letters of the alphabet.) Let me leave

you with a bit of advice about how you should go about studying and praying not only this psalm but all of Holy Scripture.

1. Modern exegesis – such as I've given in the first part of this talk – is usually helpful, particularly in establishing the literal meaning. However, do not get caught up in it. Do not fret if the Hebrew, Greek, or Latin referred to confuses you. Make a good faith effort to understand it and then trust in the Holy Ghost Who will help you to comprehend and remember what you *in particular* need to know and need to remember.
2. Do pay attention to the images and meanings which the words bring to your mind as you read and pray them.
3. Do repeat the passage over to yourself aloud (whispered is okay!) because that engages your whole self in the process of praying and understanding.
4. Do not be surprised if some word or expression you read suddenly reminds you of something in your own experience -- whether good or bad. This you join to the words of the psalmist and together you offer prayer and praise.

¹ St. Bede as quoted in *A Commentary on the Psalms* by J.M. Neale D.D. and R.F. Littledale M.D., Volume IV, Joseph Master and Company, London, 1883, pp1-2.

The source for *A Commentary on the Psalms* in a printing of the final English Edition, including the Supplements to vol. 4, London 1883, is that offered by Lancelot Andrewes Press, www.andrewespress.com

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Epiphany V, 2017

A Sermon by Subdeacon John Brainerd

Colossians 3:12-13 – *“Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.”*

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

IN TODAY’S EPISTLE, Saint Paul addresses the Church in Colossae, a town in what is now western Turkey. In verse twelve, Paul calls the Colossians the elect of God. The Church in Colossae was largely made up of non-Jews. Even though the Council of Jerusalem had recently met, confirming the Church’s position that one need not first become a Jew and obey all precepts of the Mosaic Law to be a Christian, addressing the members of the Church in Colossae in this way was controversial. However, Paul wanted to make it clear that all the brethren, in all the Churches, Jew and Gentile, shared equally in the Kingdom of God.

Paul goes on to outline how the Christian brethren in Colossae must treat one another to best accomplish their own salvation and that of their Church brethren. And, as you might imagine, Saint Paul’s admonishments apply equally to the brethren in first century Colossae, as they do to the brethren here today, in twenty-first century Denver. A couple of years ago, I attended the diocesan clergy retreat led by Archimandrite Zacharias. I think a word or two from those talks might perhaps provide further insight into today’s epistle lesson. From my brothers who attended that retreat I ask in advance for forgiveness, for my poor reproduction of Fr. Zacharias’ thoughts and wisdom.

One of Fr. Zacharias’ talks was entitled, “Building the Temple of God in ourselves and in our fellows.” He began by reminding us that one of the names Jesus uses for himself is The Way, as John 14:6 says, *“I am the way, the truth, and the life...”* Jesus is the Way to happiness and love, the way to eternal life. Fr. Zacharias encourages us, whether we have been on the way for many years, or only a short while, to not relax and ‘coast’. Instead, we must continue to be vigilant, always watching and correcting ourselves when we trip and fall or lose our way. Remember, as Jesus is the Way, when we lose our spiritual way, we are really losing contact with Jesus. We must continue to examine ourselves daily, continually, to see if we have relaxed or become negligent, having lost our contact with Jesus, lost our Way. In our lesson today Saint Paul gives us

specifics on what it means to live the life of the Christian, a checklist for our vigilance on the Way.

In verse 12, Saint Paul writes, *“Put on...bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering...”* First, the word ‘bowels’ here is used to indicate great depth, such as “the bowels of the earth”, meaning its deep interior. So, Saint Paul is telling us that as disciples we must, to the very depths of our being, be profoundly merciful to one another, always showing every kindness to all our brethren. Humbleness of mind and meekness means, we must continually curb our impulses to call attention to ourselves and dominate our brethren. Instead, we must find ways to defer to others, and, as Saint James says in his epistle, *“...be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath”*. Longsuffering means we must be willing even to accept criticisms and attacks from others, allowing their defects and errors to go uncorrected by us. *“Judge not, that ye be not judged,”* Our Lord says in Matthew 7:1. Fr. Zacharias told us that even when we justify ourselves, and don’t even retaliate, we still tear down our fellows. Imagine wading in the ocean, and a wave is coming towards you. These attacks we sometimes encounter from others are like an evil ocean wave coming towards us. Fr. Zacharias said that rather than to fight against the wave of evil, *“...the victory is to go under the wave of evil, and come up on the other side.”*

In verse 13, Saint Paul continues his explanation of care for our brethren, *“...forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.”* Here, Saint Paul tells us when conflicts arise, we must show forbearance towards one another, caution in our judgment and actions, again *“...swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.”* We must find ways to forgive one another at all costs. Perhaps you are starting to feel like all this is too difficult, really too much, and why should I forgive every ignorant slight, condone every moronic behavior? Saint Paul sense our hearts reaction to his words, and suggests at the end of the verse that, *“...even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.”* Every arrogant thought we allow to dwell in our minds, every word we say that injures another’s reputation, every deed of malice or neglect we perform, each one is a slap in the face of Our Lord, a nail in His hand, an insult to His selfless sacrifice of Love for us. But, He freely forgives us, offering us His other cheek to slap, holding out His other hand to the nail, carrying His cross up the hill of Calgary once again, to offer His sacrifice for us. So too, we must find it in our hearts to forgive our brethren every insult, every slight, no matter how small. As Saint Paul tells us in Ephesians Chapter 4, *“And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.”*

I hope at least some of you are thinking, “Wow, that is not going to be easy at all.” If so, that is good, as it means I am communicating. Loving one’s neighbor is not always easy. Archimandrite Zacharias said a number of times during his talks, “*These are hard sayings.*” In fact, the title of his talks for our retreat was To Live a Christian Life is Impossible. All One Can Do Is ‘Die Daily’. Fr. Zacharias explained to us that an aspect of Our Lord’s Incarnation was the revelation of His zeal for us. We must place our hope and trust in Our Lord’s zeal for us, that is we must trust Him, even to go so far as to, “*Keep thy mind in hell, and despair not!*”, as Saint Silouan teaches us. But, how do we act upon this trust? We must learn to pray for ourselves. When we find ourselves discouraged, when we find ourselves failing to live as we think we ought, when we find ourselves lonely and sorrowful, we must take each of these occasions, and turn to Our Lord and say, “Lord, have mercy on me, the sinner.” We can offer each of these moments to Our Lord, and take each as an opportunity to ask Our Lord to enter our heart, and make it a suitable dwelling place for the Holy Spirit. Next, we must learn to pray for our brethren. Each time we feel slighted by another, each time we feel insulted or betrayed, we can take this opportunity to pray for our brethren, calling to mind Our Lord’s zeal for each of his children, and asking Our Lord to kindle some tiny portion of His zeal in our hearts. Fr. Zacharias told us that if we can gain some small zeal for the building up of the temple of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of our brethren, we become coworkers with God in our fellows’ salvation.

In verse 17 of our lesson today, Saint Paul says, “*And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.*” Saint Paul explains that in each thing we do, at work, at play, when we first wake in the morning, when we go to bed at night, we give thanks to God. Fr. Zacharias too advised us to find ways to pray prayers of gratitude. He said to thank God continually for all His blessings. Sometimes, and we cannot find it within ourselves to forgive our brethren, or ourselves perhaps. Fr. Zacharias said that our prayers of gratitude can soften our hearts, allowing the gift of forgiveness to creep in. So, make time during your day to thank God. Thank Him for each gift He gives you. Occasionally, God gives me the gift of remembering to thank Him for things in my life. Lately, I have been trying to thank him for small things, things I might take for granted, like the gift of my modest skills with computers, or the fact that my car starts, or for the internal combustion engine, or for big things, like the gift of my beautiful wife and lovely children in my life, or the gift of this wonderful world He has given me to live in. You don’t have to wait until something big happens to thank

God. He has time to listen, whenever you have time to talk.

To me, these few verses of Colossians from today’s epistle are an achingly beautiful description of what the Christian life looks like. I would like to be bold, and offer my humble advice to each of you. Take a moment each day this week, and read through this lesson, look it up in your prayer book, look it up in your Bible, take a bulletin home with you, if you like. But read through it; it is only six short verses. Take a minute, and reflect on them. Does anything in particular come to mind? Does a particular phrase or word catch your eye? Does anything speak to something that has happened in your life that day, or something that is going to happen? Try opening your heart to God during this time.

So, where does this leave us? Saint Paul outlines in today’s epistle qualities he sees as necessary for the spiritual health of each of us. His words, together with those of Archimandrite Zacharias and Saint Silouan provide a guide to the life of the Christian brethren, both in first century Colossae and twenty-first century Denver. By learning to treat your brethren with kindness, with mercy, with humbleness of mind and meekness, by turning your hearts away from resentments and instead towards forgiveness and gratitude, you will find yourselves able to make a place in your hearts so that you may, as Saint Paul writes in verse 16, “*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.*”

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