

First Week of Lent
Sunday, February 14, 2016

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.
Romans 5:1-5

If we choose to grasp this knowledge firmly by means of faith, we can keep ourselves mindful of it by putting it into practice; and God then gives us greater ardour, knowledge and power. For our pursuit of natural knowledge kindles our ardour, and this ardour increases our capacity to put the knowledge into practice. By putting it into practice we keep ourselves mindful of it, and this in its turn induces us to practise it to an even greater extent. Greater practice is rewarded by greater knowledge; and from the understanding thus acquired we gain control of the passions and learn how to endure our sufferings patiently. Sufferings produce devotion to God and a recognition of His gifts and our faults. These give birth to gratitude, and gratitude inculcates the fear of God which leads us to the keeping of the commandments, to inward grief, gentleness and humility. These three virtues produce discrimination, which gives us spiritual insight and makes it possible for the intellect in its purity to foresee coming faults and to forestall them through its experience and recollection of what has happened in the past; in this way it can protect itself against stealthy attacks. All this generates hope, and from hope come detachment and perfect love.

Once we have advanced thus far we shall not wish for anything except the will of God; rather we will joyfully abandon this transitory life out of love for God and for our fellow-men. Through the wisdom and indwelling of the Holy Spirit and through adoption to sonship, we are crucified with Christ and buried with Him, and we rise with Him and ascend with Him spiritually by imitating His way of life in this world. To speak simply, we become gods by adoption through grace, receiving the pledge of eternal blessedness, as St. Gregory the Theologian says. In this way, with regard to the eight evil thoughts, we become dispassionate, just, good and wise, having God within ourselves – as Christ Himself has told us (cf. *John 14:21-23*) - through the keeping of the commandments in order, from the first to the last. I will speak below about how the commandments should be practised.

Saint Peter of Damascus (c.12th Century)
The Philokalia

Peter of Damascus encourages his readers to put into practice the virtues of God that we might grow closer to God in devotion and thanksgiving. Greek Orthodox Christians believe in the doctrine of *theosis*, which is the doctrine of becoming like God through the grace of Jesus Christ. *Theosis* means God living in our hearts and our minds. Thus the more we practice the virtues of God, the more we become God-like.

The Greek Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church split in 1054AD which we call The Great Schism. This week the Roman Catholic Pope and the Russian Orthodox Patriarch will meet for the first time ever in Cuba. Originally the arguments were over married clergy, leavened bread, Roman supremacy and the origins of the Holy Spirit.