



My Beloved Ones,

I greet you with love and joy as we are blessed to begin Triodion, where each week prepares us for Great Lent. The Epistle for this Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee shows Paul instructing his disciple Timothy (the son of a pagan father and a Christian mother) to hold fast to his faith, even in a time of persecution.

St. Paul reminds Timothy that the young man not only witnessed “...*my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness*” but also, “*my persecutions, my sufferings, what befell me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra...*” (*II Timothy 3:10-11*). In Antioch, there was the controversy over whether Gentiles must submit to circumcision; in Iconium, Paul and Barnabas’s ministry stirred up anger; but traveling to Lystra, Paul *was* stoned, but survived.

Truly, Paul seeks to show Timothy—and us—that being a Christian is not always easy, or pleasant. Following Christ means that non-believers may see us as strange, or even suspicious. Paul confirms this when he tells Timothy, “*Indeed all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil men and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceivers and deceived*” (*II Timothy 3:12-13*). Think of the boastful and judgmental Pharisee, respected by all, compared to the sinful, repentant tax collector, judged by the Pharisee and his neighbors.

As we consider the importance of humbling ourselves like the Publican, we cannot lose sight of the fact that the exalting of which our Lord speaks in His Parable is not the exaltation of the world. The humble will be exalted in the Kingdom of Heaven, but we must first be willing, like St. Paul, to suffer the judgements of this world, with a broken and contrite spirit, clinging forever to our Rock, which is Christ, and the Teachings and Traditions of His Holy Church.

+ALEXIOS

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