

**Deacon Paul Tshakis Reflections**

**Winter Fast**

Be still, and know that I am God. (Ps. 45:11) is a beautiful verse from the Book of Psalms. It implies that if we can be still...we will know God. Yet, as most of us carry a cell phone that is really a small computer, finding time and desire to choose and put it away and focus on God for even a few minutes can be a tremendous challenge. Being still requires that we put the phone and everything else aside and stop talking for a while, and try to listen to the still, small voice of our Lord that is always trying to get our attention.

This aspect of stillness and silence is depicted beautifully in Orthodox icons. Mouths are never depicted open in icons. The reason is that icons are meant to be silent, to convey stillness, to draw you in to an atmosphere of prayer and contemplation. Here again, we are reminded that we too should regularly find time to close our mouths and be silent.

In the first chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, St. Paul notes that we would know God and His Power and Divinity if we only took the time and contemplated His gift of Creation. In fact, St. Paul wrote that this knowledge of God would naturally lead us to continually glorify Him and thank Him. He wrote this because God created "man" (Genesis 1:27) in His Image. The Greek word for "man" is "anthropos," which is derived from two ancient Greek words; ano-which means up, and throsko-which means to look. Thus, God created us to always "look up" to Him and continually glorify and thank Him for everything.

In a very beautiful passage our Lord says that when we remember Him and accept His Gospel, that a divine mystery occurs in our hearts whereby "...a man sleeps by night and rises by day and does not know how the Kingdom of God springs up in him" (Mark 4:27). This means that slowly and day-by-day, if we regularly take some time and try to close our mouths, be still, listen for Him, and glorify thank Him, that somehow... we become aware of His presence within us.

It is with this spirit that we approach the Winter Fast with its celebrations of Thanksgiving and Christmas. If we choose to find a little time...to be still...to observe His marvelous Creation, we will instinctively offer Him glory and thanksgiving, and thus welcome Him into our hearts and lives.