***2017 11 12 2017 THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK***

***“Each one must do as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver...”***

On this Sunday on which we celebrate the memory of St. John the Merciful (or almsgiver) St. Paul reminds us of how and why we should give of the material possessions that God has so richly provided for us. First we must realize that *everything* we have is a gift from God which is given to us *not* as our own possession but rather to manage for Him. He wants to provide us with enough to take care of our own families and also to share the remainder with those who are in need (both spiritual and material needs). So often we are afraid that if we give away our possessions we will be left needy ourselves. This attitude is a delusion that comes from three sources-the evil one, our own self-centeredness, and from our lack of faith. St. Paul makes clear that nothing, absolutely nothing bad will happen if we give substantially of our possessions. He says quite clearly that it is the opposite; ***“God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that you may always have enough of everything and may provide in abundance for every good work.”***

Beloved in Christ Jesus,we will never progress in the spiritual life if we bury in the ground (of our bank accounts and pension plans) that which God has given us to use for those in spiritual need (His Holy Church) , and those in material need (the poor and needy). If we hide the talents which God has given us, we will indeed “reap sparingly. Even for those who give it is important to recognize that God’s grace is not poured out on those who give as a formal obligation or those who give with grumbling and discontent. When St. Paul says “God loves a cheerful giver” what he is telling us is that we should be eager to give -thrilled to give-for when we give to God we are expressing our love and trust in Him. His love, that is His grace, will in-turn be poured out into our hearts to further strengthen our faith and our love for others. It is astounding that what St. Paul is really saying here is that the giver is receiving much more benefit than the recipient of our charity! This is quite clear in that the whole thrust of this passage is focused exclusively on the one who gives.

Finally my beloved in Christ Jesus, we must not delay in our giving. We must not delay until we have a certain level of income or are set with our pension plans. We must not delay until we have bought the house of our dreams or our kids are through college. We must give now that which we can- for now is the time of salvation, and we never know how long we will have this opportunity. In the parable of the 10 Virgins, the 5 wise virgins had oil in their lamps and the 5 foolish had none. When the Bridegroom came, the 5 with oil entered into the joy of the wedding feast and the 5 without oil were not able to enter. God forbid that any of us who love Christ will be shut out of His wedding feast. The universal interpretation of this parable is that the oil in the lamps are the alms or material possessions that we have given to the needy (the words for “oil”: and “mercy/alms” have exactly the same root in Greek.)

Therefore my dear ones in our Lord, let us give now and give substantially. We must begin to give as much as we can from a cheerful and eager heart. If we begin in this way, we will learn that, slowly but surely, we can give even more. God’s love has no limits and neither should ours. He will indeed provide every good thing to those who love Him. Amen.