**8 28 16 *“THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK”***

***“For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the Gospel. I urge you, then, be imitators of me”***

With this important verse, the blessed Paul tells us what our relationships within the church were really meant to be. We must pay close attention to these few words, for they will give us the key to living our church lives and also our family lives. In this day and age when there is so much confusion regarding our roles in life- particularly our roles as fathers and mothers, men and women, priests and laity- St. Paul’s words are crucially important for us.

First we must understand that there are many who can teach us about Christ. We can go to bible studies, seminars, retreats and read books to learn about our Lord and our faith. These are generally good-provided they are teaching us about the Orthodox way of life in Christ. But these are merely guides who give us some knowledge. They cannot form us or give life to us, for it is only within the family where we are born into Jesus Christ. In is only within the family where our souls are given life and where we experience intimate love. This family, beloved, is our church. Our father is God Himself, present in the bishop and priest, and our mother is the Holy Theotokos whose presence with us is the very center of our life in Christ. Her presence with us is manifest in all of the holy women in the church, particularly the Khouriyee or matushka and indeed, all the pious women. Their job is to love us and intercede for us-and Christ Himself will never neglect their prayers. Their love will bind us together as children.

The role of the bishop and the priest is to be the father of the family, as it is for each of the men to be fathers of their own families. The father is the source and of unity. He is the one who will protect his children, even at the expense of his own life. He will guide them, protect them, nourish them, and neglect his own material welfare for the sake of his children. He will lift them up so that they enter the Kingdom of Heaven before he himself goes in. He will become poor so that his children can become rich. He will suffer insults, slander, and even be treated as trash by the world, for the sake of his children. And sometimes he must discipline or punish one of his children for the sake of the entire family. He must be strong and destroy every wild animal and every danger that comes near his family. To the bishops and priests**,** I say, **this is our job, let us be obedient.**

To the faithful I say, **how could we not love and obey our fathers**, especially our bishop and our priest? How could we not love and obey our mothers? Our job is to love and obey them, not to judge them.  ***“For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named.”***

***(Eph.3:14-15)*** This, beloved, is the meaning of our roles within the church. Amen.