***1 31 16***

***THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK***

***“Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophetic utterance when the council of elders laid their hands upon you.”***

On this thirty-first Sunday after Pentecost we hear St. Paul’s advice to his pupil Timothy, who was much younger, but was ordained to be the Bishop of Ephesus. He urges Timothy not to neglect the gift that was given him by the laying on of hands of the elders. In this case the council of elders refers to the bishops who ordained Timothy. The special gift he was given was the gift of the episcopacy to teach and preserve the Orthodox faith, and to oversee the whole ministry of his church in Ephesus. The grace was given to him so that he could in turn give and minister the variety of gifts to the whole church. God has ordained that the grace of the Holy Spirit comes to us through the Bishop, and in turn, through the priests who represent him. These gifts are given to them not as their own possession but so that they can give them to the faithful. Our Lord instructs the Apostles in the Gospel of Matthew; ***“freely you have received, freely give.”***

Every Christian has been given gifts through the laying on of the hands of the priest in Holy Baptism and Chrismation. The Grace or Power of the Holy Spirit has been given to us but we must take this gift and make it fruitful in our lives. The gift that has been given to us is faith, but we must act on this faith. St. Peter tells us ***“as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness….. giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, 6 to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, 7 to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. 8 For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”*** (2Pe 1:3, 5-8)

Beloved in Christ Jesus, let each one of us make holiness the object of our lives. This is not only for monks or clergy, but for each one of us who is a new creation in Jesus Christ. The first step to holiness is to acquire virtue. Virtue is not an external action but an internal disposition. And the source of all virtue is humility, just as the source of all sin is pride. Let us reject pride at every moment of our lives. For example, when we are angry with someone who has insulted us or even disagreed with us, let us ask their forgiveness. If someone is impatient with us, let us be patient with them. Let us make excuses for others, even as we accuse ourselves. Even if, at first, it seems mechanical or hypocritical, we must pursue humility, vigorously, externally, and the grace of God will empower us to acquire this virtue internally. St. James writes; ***"God opposes the proud, But gives grace to the humble."7 Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. (Jam 4:6-8)*** By this means we will stir up and not neglect the gift which has been given to each one of us. Amen.