**2017 12 31 THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK**

***“Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved His appearing. ”***

 On this first Sunday before the great and holy Feast of Epiphany the blessed Paul gives us the entire meaning and goal of our spiritual lives- and that is ***“to love His appearing”*** (tin epiphanian). Let us explore what it means ***“to love His appearing”*** or His Epiphany. Our Lord Jesus Christ has appeared or manifested Himself to us in three ways- each interrelated.

 First He appeared to us in His Holy Birth and in His Holy Baptism. When He was Born and when He was Baptized, the heavens were opened, and the glory of God was manifest, first by the angels and second by the Holy Spirit Himself. With His Baptism, our God, has restored holiness to all of the created world. He restored everything in this world to be a way to be with Him. Water has become holy and through this water we are united to Him in Baptism- we are clothed with Christ. That is, we are given the freedom to truly love Him by rejecting everything that takes us away from Him- self-centeredness, worldly cares, and sin.

 The second way that Christ appears to us is when we strive to cleave to Him by keeping His commandments. We must make every effort to keep His commandments-that is to love God and our neighbor- not for our own egos nor simply to be loved by others in return. Rather, we must keep His commandments so that we might love Him- and in this love, we become His sons and daughters. We simply cannot love God and choose pride, lusts, and worldly affairs as the object of our lives. Jesus said, ***"He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him."…."If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. (Joh 14:21-23 NKJ).*** In the keeping of the commandment of love, through faith- our Baptism becomes not only freedom but now it becomes a permanent glory deep in our hearts- ***“we will make our home with him.”***

Finally our Lord will appear to us at the Second and Glorious coming, when all will stand before the Judgement Seat. A foretaste of this Glory was seen on the Mount of Transfiguration and also occurs every time we celebrate the Divine and Holy Liturgy. If in this life we have had a firm resolve to cleave to Christ deep within our hearts, then we will love His appearing. All who stand strong in this love will find salvation.

“*The tree whose roots are fixed deep in the earth is not shaken by the utmost violence of the storm, but if it be set lightly in the surface of the ground, a slight gust of wind will tear it up from the roots. So it is with us; if our flesh be nailed down by the fear of God, nothing will be able to shake us” (St. Chrysostom on 2 Timothy).* This fear of God cannot be separated from His Divine love. For even if , at times we fail-if we come running back to Him with tears and an even firmer resolve to come into our Father’s House-to ***“go and sin no more”-*** we can be absolutely confident that He will always come out to meet us. He will run to embrace us. This is what true repentance is, this is what it means to live a Christian life, and this is what it means to ***“love His appearing.”*** From this moment let each one of us make a firm resolve to cleave to Christ in our thoughts and in our actions, that we may rejoice in this unfathomable love.