**2017 9 24 *"THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK"***

 ***“Timothy, my son, you have observed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions, my sufferings, what befell me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra...”***

 The Church has placed St. Paul’s letter to Timothy precisely on this Sunday of St. Thekla for a reason. Let us understand its inner connections. Saint Thekla was born into a prosperous pagan family in the city of Iconium and was betrothed to a young man. St. Paul came from Antioch to Iconium to preach, and the crowds were gathering. St. Thekla’s parents would not let her go to listen to St. Paul, but she found that if she sat near her bedroom window she could hear every word. She listened for 3 days and 3 nights and her heart was converted and burned for Christ. She decided to remain a Virgin and not marry, and for this her parents went to the authorities to complain about St. Paul and his preaching. Paul was arrested and St. Thekla secretly went to the prison and listened further to the Good News. Her parents were furious, and had her arrested and she underwent many tortures-from which she was always delivered whole and sound by our Lord. St. Paul was stoned and expelled from Iconium. Thekla later joined him in preaching and converted many to the faith- this is why she is called equal to the Apostles. Ultimately, after many trials and tribulations she fell asleep in the Lord, peacefully, at age 90. She had suffered many things and indeed gave her entire life for her faith- for this she is also called Protomartyr. She is the first woman martyr in our church. Shortly after her death a community of virgins went to live in her mountain cell, building a small chapel to enshrine her body. This convent of St. Thekla still exists today near the village of Ma’loula, Syria.

 Beloved in Christ Jesus, we must understand that as St. Paul says “**all** who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. We must not fear being mocked, taunted, or even called intolerant and narrow-minded. The value and health of our soul is absolutely the most valuable thing we have- it is indeed priceless. We must not allow anything to harm our souls therefore we must pursue with all of our strength to live a godly life in Christ. We must preserve love at all costs. We must uphold righteousness in all cases, yet without personal judgement. We must seek purity and wholeness in our own lives. This will only come from our relationship with the living Christ. It is neither our knowledge nor what we say which will save us and those around us; but rather it is who we are and how we function. St. Paul sums this up perfectly “you have observed my teaching, my conduct , my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love……My dear ones in our Lord let us imitate St. Paul, for in so doing our children and our loved ones will seek to imitate us. This is how we can save ourselves and our families. Amen.