**11 27 16**

***“Thought for the Week”***

***“(God) raised us up with Him, and made us sit with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, …”***

My beloved in Christ Jesus today we read St. Paul telling us that we, as Christians, are living in heaven, even as we live on this earth. This may seem somewhat ethereal or even puzzling to some Christians because they have a misunderstanding of what heaven is. Many think heaven is a place where we hopefully go to when we end this life. It is removed from our present experience and opposed to the world that we live in.

For us as Orthodox Christians, the Kingdom of Heaven exists where the King is. Where Christ is, there is heaven. If Christ is in us, the Kingdom of heaven is within us.

We must be aware that this is not simply a metaphor but a reality in us. If we know the Kingdom is within us, how can we not rejoice and be thankful continuously? In the Gospel of John He Himself tells us ***“"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 14:23 NKJ)*** We must turn inward in our prayer so that we can enter into this magnificent place that the Lord has placed in us. It is a place of love and beauty. If we dwell there with Him we must preserve this place of love and beauty by our actions.

Beloved in Christ Jesus, for us who are in Christ Jesus we enter into this place every week first and foremost in the Divine and Holy Liturgy. In the Holy anaphora the priest prays… ***“and when we had fallen away didst raise us up again, and didst not cease to do all things until thou hadst brought us back to heaven, and hadst endowed us with thy kingdom which is to come.”*** In the Holy Liturgy, let us strive to enter into this beautiful place which the Lord has prepared inside of us. Let us taste the of heavenly banquet , see the beauty of our Father’s house, and be humbled by the love that exists there. If we strive to experience the Liturgy in this way we will be both on heaven and on earth for the two have come near to each other. Tears will well up deep inside of us and we will never want to leave this place. We will “depart in peace” and carry this peace with us by loving, by forgiving, and by sacrificing for all whom we encounter.

Lastly, my beloved, let us come down from heaven back to this earth. We must recognize that ***“For now we see in a mirror, dimly.”*** None of us can or will fully enter into this Kingdom in this world, for it is still to come. None of us can or do experience the Holy Liturgy in the way we should. It is still obscured, more or less, by our own sins and the sinfulness in which we are immersed. We are usually distracted and unworthy of such a vision. It is our job now to repent- to knock at the door of this beautiful place. Let us knock- by preparing ourselves for the Holy Liturgy and by sincere confession. Let us knock- by asking forgiveness of those who have offended us and by leaving the filthiness of sinful pride behind us. If we knock in this way- be assured that the Lord will open the door, and we will get a glimpse of that place of beauty and light. This glimpse will indeed be enough to sustain us for the rest of our lives here on this earth. We must only remember it. Amen.