**1 10 16**

**THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK**

***“The land of Zebulon and the land of Naphtali, toward the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned.”***

 On this first Sunday after the great and holy Feast of Epiphany, the Gospel proclaims that a great light has now come into the world. When light comes to us, then we can see what truly exists around us. When we are in darkness, we cannot see either the reality of the physical world nor the spiritual world. Let me explain further.

 First we must understand that the organ by which we perceive truth and reality is not our brain but rather our hearts. The heart is the spiritual center of our being. The heart is where we love, where we pray, and where we meet God. When God is present in our hearts they are healthy we are full of light, and our vision is perfect. Our prayers are fervent; we love God and we love our neighbor.

 But if we reject God by choosing to sin, then our hearts become darkened because the window to our heart has been covered with dirt and the light can no longer enter. The source of all sin is pride and self-centeredness. Instead of being thankful to God for all of our blessings, we think that we are the cause of our own good. We think we are in control of everything and that everything depends on us. If we become the center of our own worlds, what need do we have for God? Instead of loving our neighbor, we come into conflict with them because they may threaten our pride and our sense of self-control. This state of self-centeredness is the ***region and shadow of death***. Our prayers have no strength, our hearts lack thanksgiving, and we begin to criticize and judge our neighbor. Blessed St. Paul writes; ***“because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.*** (Rom 1:21 NKJ)

 The good news, beloved is that we have become children of the Light. We call Baptism, ***“Holy Illumination”***; We sing in the Great Doxology- ***“Glory to Thee who hast shown us the Light”***; We pray before reading the Gospel in the Divine Liturgy- ***“Illumine our hearts O Master, with the pure light of Thy Divine Knowledge, and open the eyes of our minds to the understanding of Thy Holy Gospel teachings”;***

And at the end of the Divine Liturgy we sing ***“We have seen the true light, we have received the Heavenly Spirit.”*** This is the great joy of our Christian faith- we can now see again. Our love and our freedom have been restored to us. Let us guard this, jealously, by striving to reject sin, by constantly cleaning the windows of our hearts through repentance, and by being thankful to God every day and every minute for all that He has given us. In this way the Light will shine brightly in us and we will see reality as it truly is. We will be filled with love, joy, and peace! This is the goal of our Christian lives. Amen.