***5 14 17***

***“THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK”***

***“For a whole year they met with the church, and taught a large company of people; and in Antioch the Disciples were for the first time called Christians.”***

      Our present day Antiochian Church has a great and venerable history, started in the very first century and carried to us over 21 centuries.  Our present Patriarch John X is the 171st Patriarch of Antioch.  The Orthodox faith, beloved, is indeed a precious inheritance given to us by God.  But we must understand that it is more than a historical transmission of a set of precepts and correct theology.  It is more than the proper performance of the Liturgy and the decorating of our Churches rooted in tradition.  The Orthodox faith, beloved, is an ethos, an attitude, and a way of relating to life.

     If we read Acts 11 carefully we will see this ethos. First, when tragedy stikes- we must humble ourselves and glorify God-for He can use even tragedy for His own purposes. We fear God, love Him, and trust Him with all aspects of our lives-even our tragedies. If the persecutions did not occur in Jerusalem with many of our faithful being killed, then our faith would never have spread to Antioch and then to the world.  It would have remain limited to Jerusalem and we would not have it today in our blessed country.

      Second, the Orthodox Faith must reach out to the communities where we are.  If the Jewish disciples did not go out of their comfort zone and reach out to the Greeks and foreigners in Antioch- our faith would have remained limited and probably disappeared.  The Church then in Jerusalem sent Barnabus who in turn went  and brought Paul to them- teaching our faith to them for a whole year.  We, also, beloved must reach out to our communities, love our communities, and make our faith available to them. We must fill our churches with people who have never heard of the Orthodox Faith- shouting our love of Christ from the rooftops- meaning by the way we live our lives.

    Lastly, my beloved in Christ Jesus, we Orthodox must  always have a great veneration and respect for those who have given us our faith and who have labored to preserve it.  That includes our parents, our Saints, and especially our Patriarchates-from whom we have been born. As the Lord wills, we will eventually have our own Patriarchate, as did Antioch, however for now we belong to her.  We must love her and take care of her, as did the early Antiochians- sending their love and their support to those who were suffering in Jerusalem during the famine. We must also love our cousins- the Russians, Serbs, Romanians, Ukrainians, Estonians, Bulgarians, and all Orthodox- for they are a part of us-of our flesh and bones.  We must love the whole world, for we are one humanity- all children of God- made in His image.

   Beloved the Orthodox Faith is love for God, love of our fellow humanity, compassion, hospitality, self-sacrifice, respect for our forebearers, authenticity, and humility. Let us preserve these as well as our Liturgy, our music, and our church decorations.