***1 14 16***

***THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK***

***“This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.”***

On this fourteenth Sunday of Luke we hear St. Paul’s famous statement that we repeat in every liturgy in the prayer before Holy Communion. This prayer attitude which is expressed so beautifully by St. Paul is “faithful…and worthy of all acceptance.” So we must pay close attention to this in our own spiritual lives.

The first important point is that our Lord came into the world not as a judge but as a Savior. He tells us in the Gospel of John ***“for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. (Joh 12:47 NKJ)*** Our Lord’s first and foremost desire is that every human being “be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth.” He will do anything and everything to save us, but he will not force us. We must accept this great gift of salvation by fostering a relationship of intimate familial love- we come to the Father through Him. If we love our Father, we will honor Him. If we love our Father, we will honor our mother, the Holy Theotokos. If we love our Father, we will look for ways to please Him. We will be careful to follow His way of life because we know He would never lead us down the wrong path. We try as much as possible to fulfill our Royal calling, our familial inheritance. And when we make a mistake, we come running home- to His Holy Church- and confess with tears, and resolve, with all of our hearts, never to make the same mistake again. We will always fear disappointing the One who loves us- that we do not trample on His love and the great sacrifice He has made for us. This is what the fear of God is, and this is what Faith is. We can only draw near to Christ if we have this attitude in our prayers and in our lives. Remember words of the Deacon, before Holy Communion; “With the Fear of God, and Faith, and Love, draw ye near.” These three things are inseparably connected to each other and allow us to come near to our Lord.

Most crucial, my beloved is that if Saint Paul calls himself the chief of sinners, we also must recognize and focus on our own shortcomings, and not those of others. Pride is the biggest obstacle to the spiritual life, for if we are proud, our prayers are empty, like those of the Pharisee. Humility attracts the light of God and Pride obscures it. If we recognize and ask forgiveness for the sins we have committed then two things happen. First, the light of God begins to shine brighter in our souls and we are able to see more and more the dark crevices and difficult to reach places that are covered with dirt and soiled. We can then clean these places so that our Lord can come and visit us and dwell in a clean house. Second, as our house becomes cleaner and cleaner, we begin to love and not to judge everyone else in our lives. It is only because the Lord is in us that we can love and not judge others, for He is the One who came to save the world and not to judge it. Amen.