***4 17 16***

***THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK***

***“how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (Heb 9:14 NKJ)”***

 On this Fifth Sunday of Great and Holy Lent, as we celebrate our blessed mother Mary of Egypt, St. Paul speaks to us of Christ’s blood cleansing our conscience of dead works. Of course, He was speaking to the Jews, who had a system of animal sacrifices, washings, and moral commandments from God which purified them from sin. Indeed they were purified- but only externally. They attempted to follow God’s commandments, and many in a fleshly way did, however the root of sin was still present within their souls. It is like cutting off the tops of the weeds but leaving the roots- the weeds are still there. For instance, The Lord said "***You have heard that it was said,`You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. "But I say to you, love your enemies… (Mat 5:43-44 NKJ)***. This commandment would be nonsense from a moral and externally religious standpoint.

 But our Lord was speaking to us about a deep internal change that must take place in our souls. It is a change impossible for us to accomplish, but rather He himself has accomplished it for us by sacrificing His Body and by giving us His Blood. When we receive His Body and Blood, we are receiving pure Love- a love that indeed allows us to conquer all things. It is a love that transformed St. Paul, that transformed blessed Mary of Egypt, and that can transform each one of us to live a life of service to the Living God.  ***“To serve the living God”*** means to partake of heaven itself***.***

 But this love is given to us by God only within our free wills. When we consent to allowing hatred, anger, judgement, and insults to reside in our hearts-this love is destroyed. So to receive His Blood worthily, we must strive to reject all sinful words, thoughts, and deeds that come to us. We must protect the precious gift that is given to us by preserving love at all costs. We must die to our own pride and not allow anything to defile this sacred and holy love. And do not fear, even if we temporarily fail, (for the Lord allows us to fail so that we can find humility and recognize that without Him we can do nothing) we must begin the fight again by clinging even more tightly to our Christ.

 Therefore, beloved, during this Lenten Season, let us fast externally from foods, but more important is the internal fast for which we must strive. It is a fast from anything and everything that might, in any way, diminish the love that has been given to us.

In this way, ***“we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory…” (2Co 3:18 NKJ)***