***3 20 16***

***THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK***

***“And all these, though well attested by their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had foreseen something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.”***

On this first Sunday of Holy Lent, this Sunday of Orthodoxy, we hear St. Paul’s astounding statement that reflects profoundly on how we are saved- that is we are saved together, as the Church. To understand this passage, we need to understand what is meant by “faith” and what is meant by “perfect”. Faith (in Gk. Pistis) is perhaps better translated “faithfulness.” When a married couple is faithful to each other, there is a deep trust that develops that allows each person become who they really are. It is only in this relationship of trust that love can grow, for otherwise we will love only a false pretense. Therefore, beloved, let us be completely honest with ourselves before the Lord, without any pretense. Let us recognize our sinfulness with deep regret and a firm resolve, with our whole heart, to change. This resolve must be intimately attached to the knowledge and trust that God will indeed change us. Let us trust Him completely with our all of our life- in good times and in bad times. It is in this trust that our love will grow and faith will be implanted deep within our hearts.

Secondly, this “faith” or faithfulness to God is not an individual accomplishment or attribute, but rather it is from Christ Himself that our faith comes. It is through our trusting relationship of love with Him that He gives us this very faith. St. Paul writes to Timothy ***“Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. That good thing which was committed to you, keep by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us.*** Note that the “faith” is in Christ Jesus.This “us” is the Church. It is in and through the church that we receive the Faith of Jesus Christ- together.

Finally, to be made perfect means the final redemption of our bodies- on that Day, when we rise to be “reshaped in that pristine beauty”-soul and body together. This final salvation will occur, not individually but together. As a matter of fact this is precisely what St. Paul’s epistle is addressing. All of those holy people who suffered and died in Faith- the prophets, and even the Apostles are waiting for us! St. John Chrysostom writes, *“ Do you also consider what a thing it is, and how great, that Abraham should be sitting and the apostle Paul waiting till you have been perfected, so that they may then be able to receive their reward?”* Beloved, this is why salvation is in and of the Church- it is a corporate reality. This Lent, let each one of us enter more fully into Her bosom by being faithful and obedient to Her-by personally entering into Her life of prayer and fasting. In this manner, we will receive not our own faith but the Faith and Love of our Lord Jesus Himself. We receive this Faith- together- as the body of our Lord. This is the Faith that will move mountains. This is the Faith that will save us. Amen.