**7 17 16"THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK"**

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***“I desire you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to apply themselves to good deeds; these are excellent and profitable to men.”***

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            Beloved in our Lord, St. Paul is writing to Titus, who he had ordained to be Bishop of Crete. We must understand that “good deeds” first and foremost in St. Paul’s thought meant to give alms to those who were in need. The word for ***"alms"*** in the Greek is **"*ἐλεημοσύνην"***which is closely related to the word “mercy”.  In the Hebrew this same word many times is used to translate the word**"righteousness."**In Daniel we read ***"Break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by showing mercy to the poor."***

Similarly, in the book of Luke the Lord Jesus Himself tells us ***"33 "Sell what you have and give alms; provide yourselves money bags which do not grow old, a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches nor moth destroys.*** (Luk 12:33 NKJ).   Finally, beloved, in the parable of the 10 Virgins in Matthew 25, we must understand that the **“oil”** that the Virgins needed to get into the bridal chamber was their almsgiving to the poor (see J. Chrys.)  The word ***“oil”*** and ***“alms”*** in the Greek are related in the same primitive root.

      So, we see, my beloved, that Christians have always recognized the priority in their lives to take care of the needy through their giving.  We must also understand that God desires us to give-and give substantially- of the things which we have, not so much for the benefit of the poor, but for the benefit that comes from it to ourselves.  St. Paul reiterates this in the above verse-***“these are excellent and profitable to men.”*** When we give of our material possessions to those in need it is a reflection of the love and compassion we have for our fellow human beings.  It is a recognition that we are all brothers and sisters and that God is our Father.  It is also a clear understanding that everything we have is from God, a gift, to be used for the benefit of all of His children. There is absolutely nothing worse, spiritually, than someone who has an abundance of material possessions and yet will not take care of his own family, who are in need.

     Therefore my brothers and sisters in Christ, let us give, not out of compulsion but out of the love we have for Christ Jesus.  Love will give much more than legalism. That is why the Jewish tithe was never imposed on Christians-certainly we should give more- as much as we possibly can.  As we open our hearts and give, these alms will ***“come up for a memorial before God.”*** (Act 10:4 NKJ). Let us end with a prayer from our Holy Liturgy each week that we say just after our Lord comes to be present on our altars; ***“Be mindful, O Lord, of those who bear fruit and do good works in thy holy churches, and who remember the poor; and upon us all send forth thy mercies.”***