**1 8 17**

***“Thought for the Week”***

***“Brethren, grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift.”***

 In our age of egalitarianism, St. Paul’s words seem strange and unfair- even shocking. He is clearly teaching us that some people have greater gifts and some lesser. He also implies that more or less grace is also given. He was trying to heal the jealousies that were engendered in the early church by the differing gifts. St. Paul is insisting that we, as Orthodox Christians, must understand that there is a hierarchy of gifts and of grace. Most importantly we should rejoice in this hierarchy. We must remember that in the parable of the talents one received 5 talents and another 2. But as each worked so as to double their gift, they each received the same reward and honor. If someone has received a greater gift, it is because in God’s providence and perfect foreknowledge, that person will use the gift for the salvation of all- so that all may receive equal honor. Of this person is required greater work and greater responsibility- and he or she will be held to a higher standard before the fearful judgement seat of Christ. Please remember it is according to the measure of Christ’s gift. Who are we to argue with the judgment of our God?

 Therefore my beloved in Christ Jesus, let us rejoice and be satisfied with the gifts that have been freely given to us, for each of us has a gift- some greater and some lesser. We can never deserve or merit the gifts that God has bestowed upon us. We must realize that there are a diversity of gifts and that each one is necessary. We must honor and rejoice in this diversity for it is given to us for our salvation. We must never be envious of anyone who has a greater gift- either in the hierarchy of the church, in the spiritual life or in life in general. They have been given this gift so that we might be saved. Imagine if one was going in for a complex operation and could only feel jealousy that the surgeon had greater knowledge and skill than they themselves had! We must honor and respect the fact that this surgeon worked so hard to acquire the skills that will save our life!

 In exactly a similar vein (no pun intended), we must honor those spiritual elders, monastics, bishops, priests, and spiritual mothers and fathers who have been given greater or different gifts than we have. They have been given to them by our Lord’s determination of how well and with how much work they will make them effective. We should not attempt to usurp these gifts nor compete with them in any way, for they have been given to them for our salvation! As we humble ourselves and learn from our spiritual teachers, their grace will lift us up to heaven and bestow equal honor to each one of us in the sight of our gracious Lord. This is why we honor those who rule over us- for in doing so we honor the Lord Himself. This is why there is hierarchy in the church, in the family, and in our workplaces. This is why we pray to the Saints. This is why we honor and love the Mother of God.

 Therefore my beloved in Christ Jesus, when we meet someone that has been given greater or different spiritual gifts than we have, let us honor that person, let us love that person and let us ask for their holy prayers, for they were placed in our midst by God to save us. Amen.