***T.W. 5.8.16***

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***THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK***

***“That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.”***

 On this first Sunday (anti-Pascha) after the great and Holy Feast, we hear the words of the blessed John, which are crucial to understanding of what is, and how we come to faith. When we have faith in someone, that means we trust him. St. John tells us that what the Apostles are proclaiming to us is that ***“which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands.”***

Our faith, then, begins and depends on our trust of the Apostolic witness. Our Church is built on the foundation of the Apostles. St. Paul states this clearly***-“ 19 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets…(Eph 2:19-20 NKJ).*** Here we are told that true faith cannot be individualistic but can only exist within the context of the community. It exists in Her prayers, in Her scriptures, and in Her faithful. The foundation is the Apostolic and Prophetic witness, but just as important is that we are members of the household of God- where we, ***5…” being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.” (Rom 12:5 NKJ)***

 When St. John says that our fellowship is with the Apostles, the word for fellowship in Greek is *koinonia-* which means communion or an intimate sharing of our life. He states clearly that if we have communion with the Apostolic community of the Church, we have communion or share in the very life of the Holy Trinity- the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. So, now we come to the astounding revelation that our Church is not simply an organization where we come together to pray, but rather, it is a life lived in communion with God Himself. Fr. Bulgakov stated this clearly; ***“The Church is not an institution; it is a new life with Christ and in Christ, guided by the Holy Spirit.”***

Let us descend from the theological heights to the practical level. During our recent Lenten and Holy Week services, what did we experience? Did we not experience the very life of our Lord, Himself? Did we not suffer with Him? Were we not overwhelmed by His Love- pure and untainted? When we proclaimed His Resurrection, did not life Himself come to dwell in us? This is life in the Church, and apart from it there can be no real life.

 Therefore my beloved in Christ Jesus, let us never again look upon the Church as an institution that has something to offer us. Let us instead recognize that the Church is our *koinonia*- our intimate union with our Lord Jesus Christ, our *koinonia* with the Apostles, and our *koinonia* with the thousands, and tens of thousands of Christians who have trusted, believed and experienced the very presence of Jesus Christ in His Church- His Body over the past two millennia. This *koinonia*  is an intimate and organic union deep within our hearts, souls, and bodies. We must never ask how we can fit this Faith into our own paradigms or ideas. Rather we must constantly ask, how do fit our own ideas and paradigms into this life of the Church? In this way, and in this way only ***“our joy may be complete.”*** Amen.