

His Gospel directly from "Christ". The Apostle Paul, founding Orthodox ecclesiology, has striven to indicate to us the correct "litmus test", that flies outside of every such delusion and every heresy. And this "litmus test", is not merely either a book or a person. It is "what we have evangelized" and what "you received". And both verbs in the plural, refer to the genuine ecclesiasticalness and synodality. To the Mystery of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. Only this Church safeguards the correct tradition and interpretation of the Gospel of Christ. This Church, according to Paul, has the mission and the authority to anathematize and to excommunicate, not only Paul himself, but even an angel from heaven, if he "evangelizes" another Gospel, different from that which was handed down to us to ecclesiastically (Gal. 1:8).

Today's breaking up of Western and Protestant Christianity, into thousands of groups which abolish one another, clearly is disappointing. However, there are not a few people, for whom this despair becomes the springboard for a healthy seeking of the historical one Apostolic Church, for which the former persecutor Paul "toiled more than everyone".

Archim. B. L

**SUNDAY, DECEMBER 29, 2019 SUNDAY AFTER**

**NATIVITY**, 14,000 infants (Holy Innocents) slain by Herod in Bethlehem, Our Righteous Father Marcellus, Abbot of the Monastery of the Unsleeping Ones e Our Righteous Father Thaddeus the Confessor

**TONE OF THE WEEK :** Third Tone

**EOCHINON :** Sixth Orthros Gospel

**EPISTLE READING:** St. Paul's Letter to Galatians 1: 11-19

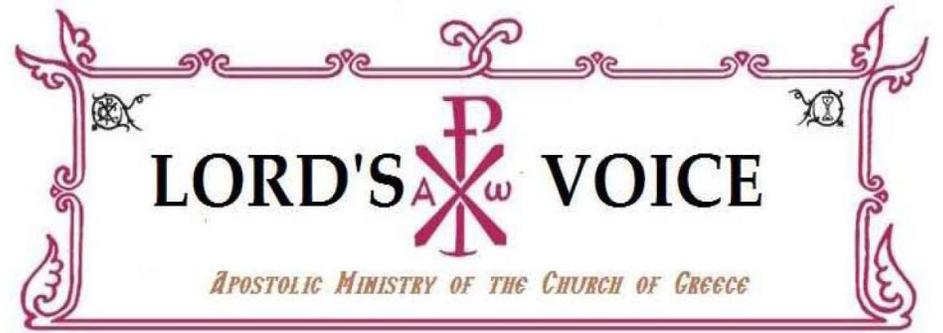
**GOSPEL READING:** Matthew 2:13-23

**SUNDAY, JANUARY 05, 2020 SUNDAY BEFORE EPIPHANY,**

*Eve of the Theophany of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, The Holy Martyrs Theopemptus and Theonas, Righteous Syncletike of Alexandria, Apollinaria of Egypt, Gregory of Akrita.*

**EPISTLE READING:** St. Paul's Second Letter to Timothy 4:5-8

**GOSPEL READING:** Mark 1:1-8



67<sup>TH</sup> YEAR DECEMBER 29 2019 PAMPHLET #52 (3474)

## THE CALLING OF THE FORMER PERSECUTOR

It is rather certain that, if Saul were living - the later Paul - in the first years of the life of Christ, he would have belonged to, those "who were seeking the life of the child", to those, in other words, who, as today's Gospel mentions, forced Christ into exile a little after His Birth. All "his conduct in Judaism", verifies this, which led him "to persecute the Church", as he himself admits. With all excess, he was trying to quench, to destroy and to wipe it out" according to the sacred Chrysostom.

### "Son, give me your heart"

However, the newly born Messiah also, in some way came to become a "conqueror". He came to "conquer" the hearts of men, not with violence, but by calling us freely with the words: "Son, give me your heart, while let your eyes observe our ways" (Proverbs 23:26). And when He met denial and rejection, He did not immediately loosen the "siege", but He insisted, lifting up His hands all day long, to a disobeying and retorting people, who did not walk on the true path". Yes! He came "in order to be revealed to those who were not seeking Him, and for those who were not seeking Him to be able to find Him" (Is. 65:1-2). Thus He also

## THE EPISTLE ST. PAUL'S LETTER TO GALATIANS 1: 11-19

Brethren, I would have you know that the gospel which was preached by me is not man's gospel. For I did not receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ. For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it; and I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers. But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and had called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia; and again I returned to Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas, and remained with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother

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stood at Saul's door and knocked. And Saul opened to Him. And Christ not only entered inside and supped with Him (Revelations 3:20) but He also called him to become an "Apostle to the gentiles".

Paul, saying that God set him apart "from his mother's womb," and that "through His grace" He called him to this high mission, does not imply some favoritism of God. God distributes the ministries and the talents according to His unfathomable judgment. It is however, obvious that, even if Saul's religious zeal had taken a crooked road, the later Apostle was neither a fleer of pain nor insincere, nor «did he take his soul in vain». Thus, when he realizes who Christ is, his "advancement" "in Judaism" and his excessive zeal for his paternal traditions, with which he was persecuting the Church, he enlightened them and made them healthy, and made them ministerial tools for the work of the gospel preaching. He changed his swords into plowshares and his spears into pruning hooks" (Is. 2:4) for the cultivation of the field

of the Church. And God, foreknowing -and not predestining - this sincere and all-eager conversion of his, judged him worthy to carry His name before gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel".

### Paul is also equal in honor with the Twelve

Obviously, it was not easy for many narrow-minded proselytes - but mainly for the false apostles - to accept, as a genuine apostle of Christ, someone who, not only did not belong to "those continuing with Christ in His trials" (Luke 22:28), but who had multiplied the trials in his Church. So for this reason, with much pain, but also with a justified boasting, the Apostle Paul is forced to speak again about his wondrous conversion, stressing that he did not receive the Gospel from humans but from Christ himself. So for this reason also, there was no reason for him to seek the advice of one of "the apostles before him", without this lessening his undivided respect for them, and particularly for the chief Peter.

The Apostle Paul's awakening vision of God, is not an autonomous event, with which someone went to make his own church. It is a foundational ecclesiastical event, which the spirit-bearing holy Apostles, not only accepted, but which essentially led, with Paul's ecumenical preaching and his martyrial death, to the edification and glory of the one Church of Christ. So for this reason, the Church did not hesitate in its iconography to present the Apostle Paul present together with the Twelve also in the Ascension of Christ and in Pentecost, even if historically he was absent.

### The saving "litmus test"

In the descending journey mainly of western Christianity, at times, quite a few false witnesses, of people appeared, who maintained that supposedly they received "renewed" editions of