



73<sup>rd</sup> Year

June 1, 2025

Pamphlet #22 (3757)

## **THE SUNDAY EPISTLE (Acts 20:16-18, 28-36)**

### **Paul bids farewell to the elders of Ephesus**

*In those days, Paul had decided to sail past Ephesos, so that he might not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hastening to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost. And from Miletos he sent to Ephesos and called to him the elders of the church. And when they came to him, he said to them: "Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God which he obtained with the blood of his own Son. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears. And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities, and to those who were with me. In all things I have shown you that by so toiling one must help the weak, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, 'it is more blessed to give than to receive.'" And when he had spoken thus, he knelt down and prayed with them all.*

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## **THE FIERCE WOLVES**

Today's Epistle reading refers to the meeting of the Apostle Paul with the presbyters of the Church of Ephesus. Paul warns them

to be vigilant in their pastoral care of God's people. He exhorts them to remain watchful, prophesying the emergence of individuals with selfish motives who will attempt to lead the flock away from the life of Christ, distort the truth of the Gospel, and create followers. This prophecy of the Apostle to the gentiles is fulfilled throughout history, as the fierce wolves he speaks of appear from time to time, fueling three great afflictions that trouble the life of the Church.

## **Heresies**

The first affliction is heresies. They arise within the Church, distorting the faith and misinterpreting the teaching of Jesus Christ, as preserved in Holy Scripture and analyzed by the Fathers of the Church. Whenever they have appeared, they have caused great harm. They contributed to exacerbating passions and to breaking the unity of the Church. But also on a personal level, heresy is the gravest evil that can befall an individual.

It is a sin greater than any other, because it severs one from the life of the Church, cuts them off from the sanctifying grace of the sacred Mysteries, and deprives them from the prospect of salvation, since outside the Church, there is no salvation. While every other sin, however serious it may be, does not exclude the sinner from salvation, as it does not expel them from the Church. As long as one remains within the Church, he can become a partaker of salvation "in Christ" through repentance.

## **Schisms**

The second affliction is schisms. These falsify the testimony of the Church and essentially violate the unity of faith. Even though their origins may sometimes lie not only in theological disputes, they distort the nature of the Church and wound love. A characteristic example is the Old Calendar schism in Greece. It began as a different estimation of the calculation of days, but it led to a partial fragmentation of the Church's unity

and a total fracturing of those who followed the schism. It is well known that Old Calendarist followers have splintered into specific fanatic factions, each of which anathematizes the other one. This reality serves as the greatest proof of the delusion and turmoil that schism brings to the Church and to the minds of those who, unfortunately, adhere to it. The sacred Chrysostom, furthermore, wanting to emphasize the gravity of schism, teaches that "not even the blood of martyrdom can erase this sin."

## **Zealotry**

The third affliction is zealotry. There exists a good zeal for cultivating virtues and living the evangelical life. However, there is also a harmful zeal, characterized mainly by haughtiness, the desire to gather followers, autonomy from the life of the local Church, a condescending critique of the ecclesiastical work, and an emphasis on outward displays of piety that attract the gullible and provoke their admiration. This "zeal without knowledge" was condemned by Paul who rebuked those who, "being ignorant of the justification that God gives, and seeking to establish their own manner of justification, did not submit to the justification that comes from God. For Christ is the fulfillment of the law, so that everyone who believes may be justified" (Romans 10:2-4). The traits of misguided zealots include religious fanaticism, excessive criticism of everything, and a Pharisaic zeal for religion that continues to crucify Christ and stone people.

Heresies, schisms, and zealotry are the three great afflictions that threaten ecclesiastical life. They contribute to division and endanger the prospect of our salvation. We must not allow them to infiltrate our lives, but secure ourselves in our ecclesiastical environment, placing trust in our Shepherds, who have undertaken the greatest task of leading us to our perfection "in Christ" and who will ultimately give, for this, a dreadful account before God.

June 1, 2025: 7th Sunday of Pascha

The Holy 318 God-bearing Fathers of the  
First Ecumenical Council (325 AD).  
Saint Justin the Philosopher and Martyr (†166); Saint Pyrrhus, Bishop.

Pl. 2nd Tone – Eothinon: 10 – Epistle: Acts 20:16-18, 28-36  
– Gospel: John 17:1-13

NEXT SUNDAY: June 8, Pentecost  
Epistle: Acts 2:1-11 – Gospel: John 7:37-52, 8:12

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