



73rd Year

June 29, 2025

Pamphlet #26 (3761)

THE SUNDAY EPISTLE (2 Corinthians 11:21-12:9)

Visions and revelations

Brethren, whatever anyone dares to boast of -- I am speaking as a fool -- I also dare to boast of that. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I. Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one -- I am talking like a madman -- with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. Five times I have received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I have been beaten with rods; once I was stoned. Three times I have been shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brethren; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure upon me of my anxiety for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant? If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, he who is blessed for ever, knows that I do not lie. At Damascus, the governor under King Aretas guarded the city of Damascus in order to seize me, but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped his hands. I must boast; there is nothing to be gained by it, but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven -- whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. And I know that this man

was caught up into Paradise -- whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows -- and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter. On behalf of this man I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses. Though if I wish to boast, I shall not be a fool, for I shall be speaking the truth. But I refrain from it, so that no one may think more of me than he sees in me or hears from me. And to keep me from being too elated by the abundance of revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to harass me, to keep me from being too elated. Three times I besought the Lord about this, that it should leave me; but he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

A CLASH OF TWO WORLDS

In the persons of the Apostles Peter and Paul, whom we honor today, two worlds collided: the old, represented by Peter, and the new, represented by Paul. Peter could not escape his Jewish past. He believed that in the Church, we must uphold the will of Christ, but we could not sever ties with the Law of Moses. Paul taught that what saves us is faith in Christ. He understood that within the Church, a Christ-centered ethos is formed; there are no divisions, everything is new.

The Apostolic Council

Peter was not opposed to all this, but he could not free himself from his Jewish background, to offend the base of the early Christian Church, who were the Judaeans. Thus, the conflict arose which took on fierce dimensions within the framework of the early Church. However, it did not result in a rupture, but was resolved at the Apostolic Council, convened in 49 AD in Jerusalem. This was the first Council in Church which was convened in the history of the Church, and remains a model of conciliar life which is followed even today. There, the problems

and disagreements were discussed, and Peter was persuaded that they must move forward and part from the past. Within the Church, there cannot be different expressions of faith or divergent traditions; we are all one body, the Body of Christ, and what saves us is the Grace of God and our faith in Him.

This was the historic decision of the first Apostolic Council in Jerusalem, through which the umbilical cord that tied the Church to the synagogue, the old to the new, was cut. If this decision had not been made, and if the Church had not once and for all severed ties with the synagogue, Christianity would have been nothing more than a mere heresy of Judaism.

Christ: The Sole Authority

The story of the two apostles leads us to three very important conclusions. The first: Disagreements can exist among the Greats of history and the Saints of the Church. If, however, from among them the sense of love leaves, then they may remain Great, but not Saints, for sainthood is not grounded in stubbornness and egotism. It is founded in love, in humility, in yielding, and in the struggle for unity.

The second point: there are no infallible people in the Church; there are no ultimate authorities. The only infallible one, and the only true authority, is Christ and the Church when it expresses itself synodally. There may be differing opinions, strong disagreements, but these must be addressed within the synodal framework of the Church's functioning. Wherever there is a sense of infallibility, there we encounter heresy, something the Christian Church has paid dearly for in its history, as it led to the greatest Christian schism of all ages.

There is also a third conclusion: Disagreements can occur on all levels: social, political, familial. But, O woe, if they lead to ruptures and stir up civil conflict among people. The only way they can be resolved is within the framework of love and unity, which are achieved only through democratic processes,

processes that our Church was the first to teach and the first to uphold.

The Holy Apostles as our exemplars

It is clear, then, how significant the holy Apostles Peter and Paul are to the Church throughout the world. For this reason, let us not leave them gazing at us wistfully from the iconostasis of our Churches while we follow a different path than the one they marked out. Instead, let us place them within our lives, our families, and our political and social reality. Their way of life, their response to problems, and the manner in which they faced them, have much to say and teach us even today.

Archimandrite E. Oik.

June 29, 2025: 3rd Sunday of Matthew

The All-Laudable and Foremost Apostles Peter († 64) and Paul († 67)

2nd Tone – Eothinon: 3 – Epistle: 2 Corinthians 11:21-12:9
– Gospel: Matthew 16:13-19

NEXT SUNDAY: July 6th, 4th Sunday of Matthew
Epistle: Romans 6:18-23 – Gospel: Matthew 8:5-13

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