

The message of our Church in the beginning of the year is simple in its expression and crushing in its truth! A Christian cannot vainly squander the time of his life. The Church calls him to that for which he was made, to live freely "in truth and love". Only that, in order to achieve this, he must cut himself off from whatsoever keeps him bound to the earth, to the supposed "loves", essentially dependencies, which restrain the spiritual journey and blind the "ruling mind", so that man not be able to freely and correctly distinguish his spiritual advantage! The Forerunner of Grace is projected as that model which assures each one about the ability of ascesis to free him from the bonds of the passions and of the crass fleshliness, in order for man to be led to truth and love, Christ himself!

Archimandrite I. N

**JANUARY 3, 2016 SUNDAY BEFORE EPIPHANY**, *Malachi the Prophet, Gordios the Martyr of Caesarea, Forefeast of the Theophany of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, Righteous Genevieve of Paris, Righteous Peter of Atroas, Righteous Akakios the Wonderworker, Righteous Thomais of Lesbos*

**tone of the week: Plagal of the Second Tone**

**EOTHINON** *Ninth Eothinon*

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

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

**NEXT SUNDAY, JANUARY 10, 2016 SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY**,

*Gregory of Nyssa, Dometian, Bishop of Melitene, Theosebia the Deaconess, sister of Basil the Great & Gregory of Nyssa, Afterfeast of the Theophany of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*

**EPISTLE:** *St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians 4:7-13*

**GOSPEL:** *Matthew 4:12-17*

**MAY THE SALUTARY YEAR 2016**

**BE FULL OF DIVINE STRENGTH AND SPIRITUAL FRUITS  
MAY THE LORD GOD RICHL Y GRANT HIS BLESSING TO  
EVERYONE**



**64<sup>TH</sup> YEAR JANUARY 3, 2016 PAMPHLET # 1 (3266)**

## FROM ASCESIS TO LOVE

As one more year is dawning, our Church takes cause of practical philosophy, so as to help man realize why the time of his life is given to him and what is the best way of taking advantage of it. While she does it in stubbornness to the times, in opposition to the secular train of thought and business aims, refusing to go along with the viewpoint that the changing of the year is one more cause for man to be faced as a consumer, who must behave as the market demands.

The Church wants man joyous and fulfilled. While she understands that for this to be achieved, man needs the truth and not the whatsoever myth, which only achieves trapping its followers into what is imaginary and a false sense. The truth frees and guides man to responsible and essential decisions. And this is crucial, since the beginning of each year, beyond all the other things, notes simultaneously also one more step to the end of the time of our life, which is limited and not infinite.

### The Forerunner

The gospel passage of the first Sunday of the year projects the person of the Precious Glorious Prophet Forerunner and Baptist John, not only in view of the great feast of Lights

## SUNDAY BEFORE EPIPHANY

### *The Gospel according to Mark 1:1-8*

The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, 'Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who shall prepare your way; the voice of one crying in the wilderness: prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.' John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And there went out to him all the country of Judea, and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, and had a leather girdle around his waist, and ate locusts and wild honey. And he preached, saying, "After me comes he who is mightier than I, the thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

---

(Theophany), in which he presides, but mainly because he is the chief person in that which we call the asceticism of Orthodoxy. He is the personification of the victorious battle against fleshliness and the proof of how much man is uplifted through such a way of life, so as to defeat the earthly dependencies and tendencies to proceed with freedom and correct judgement toward the Truth. And furthermore the height of ascetics is projected not autonomously, but in the perspective of the world's preparation to accept and come to know the coming Christ!

What today's gospel passage wants to stress is important. It projects asceticism as a way of life, not however, as the aim itself of life. The Church is not interested in asceticism for the sake of asceticism. So for this reason, she clearly differentiates herself from the views of other religions, especially the eastern ones, or philosophical systems, furthermore also from ascetical systems which are considered very close to her, as they were influenced directly either

by Christian ascetics, or by Christian apostates, like Islamic Sufism, precisely because they have lost the perspective of truth.

In each case, because our Church doesn't exist in order to make theoretical analyses nor big mouthed proclamations, but in order to offer a way of life simply and practically, wanting to speak about asceticism, she projects the person of the Forerunner, as the most successful example of asceticism, validated in God's eyes. While it is characteristic that of the eight verses which make up this passage, only one refers to the Forerunner's ascetical way of life, to how, in other words, he was dressed and what he was eating. The remaining seven describe the perspective of the Forerunner's ascetical life, which was none other than the preaching of repentance to prepare and witness to the coming Savior and Deliverer of the human race.

## Christ

And we arrive through the Forerunner to Christ! What are the main characteristics of the Christ's person? The authentic truth and completed love. But these are the characteristics which the Church calls us to also adorn our own life with. Our God is a person and love, in other words, man also was made in His image as a person and love, in other words, he was made to understand and live the truth and to be in a loving relationship and communion with God and men.

The person of Christ comes to free us from whatsoever unfree, limits us from such a journey of life, to show us the path and to secure it. So for this reason, His talk concerning God, the theology which He handed down to us and from then on the Orthodox Church preserves as the apple of the eye, is ascetical! In other words, it is not a barren theoretical speech or philosophical development, but lived, experiential, practical. It demands praying people "throughout all life", people with repentance so that "all life can be cleansed", people who claim love as a gift of God, analogous to the magnitude of their faith.