

Summary of July 29

This week at ECBS we studied half of Chapter 15 (verses 1-17) of the Gospel of St. John the Theologian (as he is known by the Christian East).

Since the Last Supper is the background and setting for our Lord's long discourse, we opened the class with presentation of the "Mystical Supper" Icon by Veronica Der-Ghazarian. This chapter was very much focused on our Christian "Life in Christ" as well as "Ecclesiology" (which is our understanding and belief about the Church).

The fact that Jesus' statement that we are to "abide in Him" is in the context of the Mystical Supper gives these words a sacramental significance. One of the deepest ways we abide in Christ is by receiving Him in Holy Communion.

To better explain the significance of our Lord's words we then contemplated another Icon, that of "Christ the Holy Vine," using the following beautiful description:

The icon of Christ as the true vine is a wonderful image of church unity. In it, the Church gives yet another teaching image when combined with the words of Jesus transcribed by the evangelist John (John 15). We read of the relationship between the Father, Christ and man. In the icon, the Apostles represent mankind, the vine-dresser Father is implicated in the depiction of a healthy vine, and Christ is present as the powerful source and center of all the branches. The Apostles draw their strength and life from Christ. As an image of unity, the most important aspect is that Jesus Christ is the source and center. Without Christ there is nothing to unify, nourish and give life. Indeed, without this nourishment it is not possible to bear fruit and the barren branches will be taken away by the vine-dresser. Yet when the branches abide in Christ, He abides in them. Abiding in Christ brings about the fulfillment of His loving promise that we thereby find that our joy may be full.

What a marvelous image of Christian unity for everyday life, too. We see that eclectic group, the Apostles; from Our Lord's beloved John; to Matthias, chosen late by the drawing of straws; to the denying Peter; to Thomas the doubter. It's a dissimilar, rag-tag group of men. But they are united more powerfully than any group in history. This is a mystery. For without losing individual character they remain one in their faith. God abides in their hearts. This is what mystically unites them. The reality of this has meaning to today's Christians. Just like that eclectic band, the Apostles, the diverse group which are the individuals of today's Church are united when they abide in the nourishing vine, which is Christ. For if the fruit-bearing Apostles, made one by common faith, are the icon of Christian unity, then we see that unity is possible only with Christ as the source and center. For as Jesus said, "I am the vine, you are the branches." -Nicholas P. Papas

http://www.orthodoxresearchinstitute.org/articles/pastoral/papas_icon_of_unity.htm

<http://www.ocf.net/jesus-christ-the-tree-of-life-and-source-of-our-unity/>

<https://iconreader.files.wordpress.com/2010/09/30.jpg>

We then considered what it means when our Lord said, "Every branch that does not bear fruit... He takes away" and again "every branch that bears fruit He prunes." We also considered how it is that Jesus' Word can "make us clean." We saw how His word and truth allows us to be cleansed of our sins. As Jesus states in v. 7, for this to happen, His word must abide in our hearts. This is reminiscent of the words of the Psalmist: "Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Ps. 118:105). In order to bear fruit for God, we must remain abiding in Him and His Word.

Jesus became incarnate (became man) and kept all of His Father's Commandments to give us and example of how to do this. But He did this not only to give us an example. According to

St. Cyril of Alexandria, by the Only-begotten Son and Word of God joining His Divine nature to our human nature, Jesus gave us the capability of receiving God's power and energy (known as grace) to be able to follow Him, abide in Him and keep His commandments.

We then discussed the practical ways we do this.

Based on our Lord's words in 15:14-15 We contemplated how we do not follow an esoteric religion. Jesus Christ and His Church has made known publicly all things he has commanded us to believe. At the same time we do not shrink back from proclaiming this faith, no matter how unpopular it may be. As our Lord said, "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels." (Mk 8:38). This is especially important considering how our country is embracing great errors like condoning same-sex so-called marriages and ignoring the horrors of Plant Parenthood in its destruction and selling of human life. Christians must stand for our faith because it is the actual truth!

The word Jesus uses in v. 16 for "chosen" when He says, "I chose you" in Gk is: ἐκλέγομαι eklégomai, ek-leg'-om-ahee; from [G1537](#) and [G3004](#) (it means in its primary sense); to select:—make choice, choose (out), or to be chosen. It is interestingly how this is related to the Gk. word Jesus uses for His Church: ἐκκλησία ekklēsia, ek-klay-see'-ah; from a compound of [G1537](#) and a derivative of [G2564](#); a calling out, i.e. (concretely) a popular meeting, especially a religious congregation (Jewish synagogue, or Christian community of members on earth or saints in heaven or both):—assembly, church.

The OSB defines the Church as follows: "The faithful are 'called out' of the world to be the Church: the Body of Christ, the Bride of Christ, the New Israel, the Ark of Salvation [bring Icon], the assembly of believers. Through the Church, Christians are united to Christ and to each other [like the metaphor of the vine]. In this community, the believer receives the grace of God through Sacraments and hears the truth of the gospel. This mystical transformation of people into one body in Christ takes place in the Eucharist. Because Christ is the head of the Church, the Church is a reflection of His incarnation, with both human and divine qualities (pg. 1777).

The word Jesus uses in v. 16 for "appointed" in Gk is: τίθημι tithēmi, tith'-ay-mee; in addition to "appoint," it also means to commit, to give, to make, to ordain, to purpose, and put or set (forth). The Apostles were ordained by Christ to lead His Church but we are all appointed by Christ through Baptism to bear fruit for God's glory.

**Your brother,
Sub-Deacon Lazarus**