**10 29 17**

***”THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK”***

***“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ Who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, Who loved me and gave Himself for me.”***

My beloved in Christ Jesus, we must, as Christians, live a life of resurrection! Christianity is not a philosophy or a set of religious principles by which we live, it is a transformation of our heart and our mind. It is, more than anything, an experience of the living Christ. It is an intimate relationship with Him. This new life is given to us as infants in our Baptism, it is nourished in us by our participation in the fearful mysteries of our Lord, and it grows in us as we seek to love others and humble ourselves- for His Name’s sake.

We as Orthodox more than any other religion believe that we are saved by the grace of God. Are we worthy of Baptism? No, my beloved, it is given to us by the love of our parents and by the love of our Lord, through His Church. It is not due to our own merit, actions, or knowledge. St. Paul states this clearly; ***“ Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection.”***

Second, this new life is given to us as we receive His body and His blood. It is too often that we take for granted the great and fearful mystery in which we participate every Sunday. As magnificent as is a beautiful sunrise or as beautiful as is the presence of a silvery full moon, these things are merely pale reflections of the mystery of the love of our God for us. It is with the fear of God and with Faith and with Love that we must draw near. The Lord Himself tells us in St. John’s Gospel; ***"He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him." As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. (Joh 6:56-57 NKJ).*** Beloved in Christ Jesus, if we are to worthily participate in this beautiful mystery, if we are to receive His life, we must prepare ourselves. Let us attend Saturday night Vespers with quietness in our souls and with eager anticipation. Let us confess our sins to our God through His priests. Let us reconcile with those with whom we are in conflict before we approach this holy chalice.

Third, we must with every breath pursue love, for it is love that brings us into the life of our God. The entire spirituality of our church centers on love. There are no spiritual gifts without love. St. Paul tells us this explicitly ***“Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts” (1Co 14:1 NKJ).*** We must pursue it by forgiving and seeking forgiveness, for in this sinful world the only way to love is through forgiveness. This love must stem from our humility, for all that is self-centered cannot be love. Let us judge ourselves not our brothers and sisters, who are indeed better than we are. St. James tells us; ***"God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble…Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.” (***Jam 4:6-8 NKJ)

My dear ones in Christ Jesus, we are a new creation. Let us never forget our calling and let us take up with eagerness the new life that is already ours. It is a life of power, it is a life of joy, and more than anything it is a life of love- for Love Himself has come to dwell in us. The life we now live we must live by faith in the Son of God who indeed loves us and who indeed lives in us. Amen.