***4 10 16***

***THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK***

***“Brethren, when God made a promise to Abraham, since He had no one greater by whom to swear, He swore by Himself, saying, “Surely I will bless you and multiply you.” And thus Abraham, having patiently endured, obtained the promise.”***

On this Fourth Sunday of Great and Holy Lent St. Paul speaks to us of God’s promise and Abraham’s endurance. Since we live in a human-centered society, many immediately, focus on the meaning of Abraham’s endurance. As Orthodox, however, we must understand that the thrust of this passage is to tell us of the incredible and unimagineable condescension and humility of our God. As human beings we swear by someone or something greater that ourselves to give assurance to others that we are not lying. Can you imagine that God, who cannot lie, and cannot swear by anyone greater than Himself, condescends to swear to us that His promises are true. He does not have to swear to anyone and yet, understanding the weakness of our faith, humbles Himself for one reason; that we might be saved in our trust in Him. Unconcerned

with His own dignity, he will do anything to strengthen our faith, to give us hope, and to save us-this is how much He loves us.

Beloved in Christ Jesus, we must believe God-we must trust Him. He has promised us that we will live forever in blessedness with Him. If we sincerely trust Him, an unshakeable hope will take hold of our souls. We can experience this hope even in the stormy sea of life, with its pain, conflict, hurt, sickness, and death. This hope, as St. Paul tells us, is a sure and steadfast anchor. ***“As the anchor, dropped from the vessel, does not allow it to be carried about even if ten thousand winds agitate it but, being depended upon, makes it steady, so also does hope” (St. John Chrysostom).*** If we have such an anchor and truly believe God, we will patiently endure and we will obtain the promise. Our God does not lie.

Finally, my beloved in Christ, what exactly is this promise? St. Paul tells us clearly, ***“a hope that enters into the inner shrine behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf.”*** This curtain is heaven itself, and the most important thing to understand for those who believe in Christ is, even in this life ***“we are already in heaven!” (St. Chrysostom).*** We experience it in the Divine and Holy Liturgy. We experience it in the love of our families and friends. We experience it even as we love those who dislike or hate us. We can touch heaven, especially in the apparent tragedies of life. Alexander Solzhenitsyn, Father Arseny, and Mother Maria all experienced this hope in the most tragic of circumstances. This hope is our great inheritance as Orthodox Christians. We must only take ahold of it by believing and trusting our God. If we do this, we also will experience heaven, here and now. Beloved, let no one or nothing take thishope from us. Amen.