

## **28<sup>th</sup> Week After Pentecost – Thursday**

**Titus 1:5-2:1** For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee: If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly. For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre; But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate; Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers. For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision: Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake. One of themselves, even a prophet of their own, said, The Cretians are always liars, evil beasts, slow bellies. This witness is true. Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith; Not giving heed to Jewish fables, and commandments of men, that turn from the truth. Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled. They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate. But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine:

**Luke 20:9-18** Then began he to speak to the people this parable; A certain man planted a vineyard, and let it forth to husbandmen, and went into a far country for a long time. And at the season he sent a servant to the husbandmen, that they should give him of the fruit of the vineyard: but the husbandmen beat him, and sent him away empty. And again he sent another servant: and they beat him also, and entreated him shamefully, and sent him away empty. And again he sent a third: and they wounded him also, and cast him out. Then said the lord of the vineyard, What shall I do? I will send my beloved son: it may be they will reverence him when they see him. But when the husbandmen saw him, they reasoned among themselves, saying, This is the heir: come, let us kill him, that the inheritance may be ours. So they cast him out of the vineyard, and killed him. What therefore shall the lord of the vineyard do unto them? He shall come and destroy these husbandmen, and shall give the vineyard to others. And when they heard it, they said, God forbid. And he beheld them, and said, What is this then that is written, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner? Whosoever shall fall upon that stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.

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When we read the Holy Scriptures, if we are to benefit, we must consider them to be words directed to us, with our eyes fixed on our Lord's eyes as we sit at His feet. As we look into those eyes, how do we feel? Are we comforted, encouraged, ashamed? Are we aware of our incompleteness, our brokenness, as we are taught about things that we barely do? What is our Lord saying to us, as his eyes shine with wisdom and love, and yet also with such perfection and brightness that we feel the sharp sting of self condemnation and shiver in the cold of our own darkness?

He tells us of a stone, and we know He is speaking of Himself. The corner stone is a heavy and perfectly formed stone, and upon it the whole edifice rises. It is the foundation of all other stones, and for the edifice to be strong, all these stones must also be perfectly formed, and fitted to the corner stone. We know that we are to be these stones, as He has told us "God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham." (Mat 3:9). We are "these stones" - common, rough stones, which in being raised up to be children of Abraham (that is, sons of God), will become smooth and perfected. In our Lord's words we are comforted, as we see in His eyes His promise.

Even though we are poor and sinful, we are called to be the elect, to be fitted to the corner stone, as the Apostle proclaims: "And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; {21} In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord:" (Eph 2:20-21) And the Apostle Peter agrees: "Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded. {7} Unto you therefore which believe he is precious" (1 Pet 2:6-8)

However, what is this that we then hear? "Whosoever shall fall upon that stone **shall be broken**; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will **grind him to powder**." We see in His eyes that He is beckoning us to make a choice, because this stone will do two things, depending on our response to it. We can be broken, or ground to powder. Neither of these sounds "precious" to our ears.

When the Jews were stoned, a large stone was thrown on them from a great height. O, the agony! To be ground to powder and blown away to the winds, forgotten and blotted out of the book of life!

We are faced with another choice - to fall upon the stone of our own volition. An yet, to fall upon this stone means we will be broken - it will hurt! But is this not a contradiction? If we are the stones to be raised up to be sons of Abraham, and to be fitted to the corner stone, how can we be of use to the building if our stone is broken? As we look into His eyes, it is clear that He understands our perplexity, and His expression tells us that there are no other choices. We, and all of mankind are faced with only two ways, each of which we may freely take. We can reject the corner stone, or embrace it. Either we will be ground to powder, or broken; the choice is ours.

Daily readings and reflections, available at <http://www.orthodox.net/scripture>  
These reflections and others are also posted on the blog: <http://stnicholasdallas.blogspot.com/>

What does this mean - to be broken? In our soul, we hear, a still small voice: "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." (Psa 50:17). We remember when the Good Samaritan dressed the wounds of the man by the road. Sometimes a wound must be lanced - broken, in order for the pus to be drained, so that a healing balm may be added. So now we understand! We must be broken in order for us to heal.

However, just as the body dreads being hurt, so does our pride resist being broken. O Lord, help us to throw ourselves upon Thee, and be broken, that we would become whole! Our pride restrains us, so with trembling we beg Thee, as Thou didst do to those out in the highways and lanes, COMPEL us to fall upon Thee! We are too weak to always make this choice, but we desire to! With St John the Damascene we cry: "But whether I will it or not, save me!" (Evening prayers, Prayer of St John Damascene which is to be said while pointing to the bed).

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i "On whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder. That is, in the original, will reduce him to dust, so that it may be scattered by the winds. There is an allusion here, doubtless, to the custom of stoning as a punishment among the Jews. A scaffold was erected, twice the height of the man to be stoned. Standing on its edge, he was violently struck off by one of the witnesses; if he died by the blow and the fall, nothing farther was done; if not, a heavy stone was thrown down on him, which at once killed him." <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/barnes/ntnotes.ii.xxi.xliv.html>