

***Hierarchs: Nicholas of Myra
Rightly Dividing the Word
Representing the High Priest
Shepherds in the Church***

**December 6, 2011
Revision C**

**GOSPELS: Matthew 5:14-19
Luke 6:17-23
John 10:9-16**

**EPISTLES: Hebrews 7:26-8:2
Hebrews 13:7-16
Hebrews 13:17-21**

The above Gospel and Epistle lessons are used for the Feast Days of eight well-known 4th and 5th Century Hierarchs as shown in Table 1. The Gospel lessons listed are used often in the West for many different occasions, especially around Easter and Epiphany. The Epistle lessons are not very commonly used in the West, however.

**TABLE 1
EIGHT 4th – 5th CENTURY HIERARCHS**

| NAME | YEARS | FEAST DAY | OFFICE | EPISTLE | GOSPEL |
|------------------|--------------|--|--------------------------|----------------|---------------|
| John Chrysostom | 347-407 | Nov. 13* | Patriarch Constantinople | Heb. 7:26-8:2 | John 10:9-16 |
| Nicholas of Myra | -343 | Dec. 6 th | Archbishop Myra | Heb. 13:17-21 | Luke 6:17-23 |
| Spyridon | -348 | Dec. 12 th | Bishop of Tremythous | Eph. 5:8-19 | John 10:9-16 |
| Basil the Great | 330-379 | Jan. 1* | Archbishop Caesarea | Heb. 13:17-21 | Matt. 5:14-19 |
| Antony | 251-356 | Jan. 17 th | Monk & Teacher | Heb. 13:17-21 | Luke 6:17-23 |
| Athanasius | 296-373 | Jan. 18 th | Patriarch Alexandria | Heb. 13:7-16 | Matt. 5:14-19 |
| Cyril | -444 | Jan. 18 th , June 9 th | Patriarch Alexandria | Heb. 13:7-16 | Matt. 5:14-19 |
| Gregory | 319-389 | Jan. 25* | Patriarch Constantinople | Heb. 7:26-8:2 | John 10:9-16 |

*** Also January 30 along with Gregory, Chrysostom and Basil.**

Appendix I is a brief biography of the above seven hierarchs. Athanasius and Gregory are commonly called Archbishop instead of Patriarch. The term “Patriarch” wasn’t used until the 5th Century. Appendix II is a summary of the Old Testament readings for Vespers before the Feast Days of the seven hierarchs. As one can see from Appendix II, considerable readings are chosen from the wisdom literature of Solomon. The implication here is that whether a person is one of the seventy elders under Moses, or the King of Israel, or a hierarch in the Church, one needs the wisdom of God to rule well.

Rightly Dividing the Word

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GOSPEL LESSONS - Matthew 5:14-19, Luke 6:17-23

This Gospel lesson is also used in the Orthodox lectionary for the Sunday of the Fathers of the 1st Six Ecumenical Councils in mid July (q.v.), and is commonly used on other occasions in the Western lectionaries.

In these Gospel lessons and verses preceding and following are a number of illustrations that have been applied to the Fathers of the Church first, and also to all of us. For example:

- Salt
- Light from a lamp on a lamp stand
- A city on a hill
- Preserving the Lord's Commandments
- Teaching men to adhere to the Lord's Commandments
- Rightly dividing the Lord's Commandments to apply to men's lives.

Salt and Saltiness

The first illustration is one of salt and saltiness. From Matthew's account, it is not clear whether Jesus is talking to His disciples or to the multitudes (compare Matthew 5:1). From Mark's and Luke's accounts, He seems to be speaking primarily to His disciples (Mark 9:50, Luke 14:33-35). And the connotation of salt in this context goes further than just the taste of food.

Salt in ancient times was valuable and was an important commodity in trade. Besides seasoning food, it was also used to keep food from spoiling in the absence of refrigeration. In all the sacrifices offered to the Lord, salt had to be present (Leviticus 2:13). The significance of this was that nothing rotting or putrefying was to be offered to the Lord.

The recipient of the animal sacrifices (after they were offered) and of the tithe, were the priests and Levites. They had no inheritance and owned no land like the other twelve tribes since the Lord was their inheritance (Numbers 18:20-24). The term used to describe the priests' and Levites' portion was called a "covenant of salt" (Numbers 18:19; 2 Chronicles 13:5). In this aspect, salt took on the implication of unbending truthfulness and lack of corruption.

In our Gospel lesson, this has strong implications, especially as applied to the Fathers of the Church. Matthew 5:13 reads literally, "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt becomes foolish (or moronic), by what shall it be salted? It has no longer strength for anything but to be thrown out and be trampled underfoot by men." From the context as applied to Jesus' disciples

(and their followers as the pillars of the Faith), this verse has strong things to say regarding the Fathers of the Church.

John Chrysostom (4th Century) commented on this exchange between the Lord and His disciples as follows:

“‘Think not then,’ He says, ‘that you are drawn on to ordinary conflicts, or that for some small matters you are to give account. You are the salt of the earth. When then? Did they restore the decayed? By no means; for neither is it possible to do any good to that which is already spoiled, by sprinkling it with salt. This therefore they did not. But rather, what things had been before restored, and committed to their charge, and freed from that ill savor, these they then salted, maintaining and preserving them in that freshness, which they had received of the Lord. For that men should be set free from the rottenness of their sins was the good work of Christ; but their not returning to it again any more was the object of these men’s diligence and travail. See how by degrees He indicates their superiority to the very prophets? In that He says they are teachers, not of Palestine, but of the whole world?’” (Homily xv on Matthew 5).

If the Fathers of the Church (both in ancient times and in the present times) adhere to unbending truthfulness and are morally straight, the whole earth will tend in that direction also. If they don’t, they’re worse than useless. Salt that’s thrown out can’t be put where anything is growing (Luke 14:35) because it alters the pH of the soil (acid/alkali balance) and inhibits growth. (That’s why crops can’t be irrigated with sea water). The only place to put it is on roads or paths where nothing is supposed to grow.

Chrysostom continues:

“Be not then impatient, as though my sayings were too burdensome. For while it is possible for others who have lost their savor to return by your means, you, if you should come to this, will with yourselves destroy others also. So that in proportion as the matters are great, which you have put into your hands, you need so much the greater diligence. For other men, though they fall never so often, may possibly obtain indulgence: but the teacher, should this happen to him, is deprived of all excuse, and will suffer the most extreme vengeance. Thus, lest at the words, ‘when they shall revile you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you,’ they should be too timid to go forth: He tells them, ‘unless you are prepared to combat with all this, you have been chosen in vain.’ For it is not an evil report that you should fear, but lest you should prove partners in hypocrisy. For then, ‘You will lose your savor, and be trodden under foot’: but if you continue sharply to brace them up, and then are evil spoken of, rejoice; for this is the very use of salt, to sting the corrupt, and make them smart. And so their censure follows of course, in no way harming you, but rather testifying your firmness. But if through fear of it you give up the earnestness that becomes you, you will have to suffer much more grievously, being both evil spoken of, and despised by all. For this is the meaning of trodden under foot” (Ibid.).

In other words, If the Lord’s disciples don’t adhere to unbending truthfulness and righteousness, they will be trodden under foot.

The Light of the World

The Gospel lesson continues on this theme to indicate that the salt of the earth is also the light of the world. One doesn't light a lamp (i.e. an oil burning lamp) and put it under a basket; one puts it on a lamp stand. In Revelation 1:11-20 the seven Churches in Asia to whom the Apostle John addressed chapters 2 and 3 are referred to as seven lamp stands. They were the light of that part of the world. Yet they each had something that they needed to repent of and correct. And if they didn't do so, John said that their lamp stand would be removed from its place (Revelation 2:5). These are the things that the Church Fathers were very much involved with. Chrysostom pointed out that they were to be the light of the world; not of one nation, not of twenty states, but of the whole inhabited earth (Ibid.).

A lamp set on a lamp stand, like a thriving Church in its own region of the world, is a city set on a hill (Matthew 5:14). It's not easy to hide a thriving Church because people see their good works and glorify our Father in Heaven (Matthew 5:16). Chrysostom wrote:

“Again, by these words He trains them to strictness of life, teaching them to be earnest in their endeavors, as set before the eyes of all men, and contending in the midst of the amphitheater of the world. ‘For look not to this,’ He says, ‘that we are now sitting here, that we are in a small portion of one corner. For you shall be as conspicuous to all as a city set on the ridge of a hill, as a candle in a house on the candlestick, giving light’ “ (Ibid.).

The Beatitudes and the Commandments

The term “beatitude” comes from the Latin word for blessedness: *beatitudo*. The beatitudes of Luke 6 were part of the “Sermon on the Plain”, where Jesus came down from a mountain (or high hill) and stood on a level place to teach (Luke 6:17). The place He came down from may have been the mountain where He taught the “Sermon on the Mount” (Matthew 5:1), since the two accounts occurred about the same time of year. The subject matter of Luke's account are very similar to the Beatitudes taught in Matthew 5:3-12. Table II compares the Beatitudes in Luke to those in Matthew. John Chrysostom also contrasted them with some of the Lord's Commandments that the Lord “rightly divided” as described in Matthew 5, 6 and 7. For example, the Beatitudes address the humble (i.e. the poor in spirit) and the meek among other things; the Commandments address the opposite quality in mankind: anger and arrogance respectively. The Beatitudes address the reward for those who do right while the Commandments address the punishment for those who neglect or set aside the Lord's Commandments.

TABLE II
BEATITUDES versus COMMANDMENTS

| VIRTUE | BEATITUDE Matthew 5 | BEATITUDE Luke 6 | REWARD | VICE | COMMANDMENT Matthew 5-7 | PUNISHMENT |
|-----------------------|---|---|----------------------------|---------------------|--|--|
| HUMILITY | Blessed are the poor in spirit (v.3) | Blessed are the poor (v.20) | Kingdom of Heaven | ANGER | Do not murder; do not be angry (5:21). Pray, fast, give alms in secret (6:1-18) | Judgment (v.21) |
| MEEKNESS | Blessed are the meek (v.5) | | Inherit the earth | ARROGANCE | Do not call brother a fool (5:22) | Hell fire (v.22) |
| RIGHTEOUSNESS | Blessed are the ones hungry & thirsting for righteousness (v.6) | Blessed are the ones hungry now (v.21) | Be satisfied | REVENGE | Love enemies: "Golden Rule" (5:38-48) | Same as tax collectors (5:46, 47) |
| MERCY | Blessed are merciful (v.7) | | Obtain mercy | GREED | Forgive others. Don't lay up treasure on earth (6:19); one can't serve God & mammon (6:24) | No forgiveness from God (6:15). Body full of darkness (6:23) |
| PURITY | Blessed are pure in heart (v.8) | | See God | LUST | Do not commit adultery; do not lust (5:27-32) | Cast into hell (5:29, 30) |
| RECONCILIATION | Blessed are the peacemakers (v.9) | | Called sons of God | UNFORGIVING | Be reconciled quickly; agree with adversary (5:23-26) | Debtor's prison; no forgiveness from God (5:24-26) |
| MOURNING | Blessed are those who mourn (v.4) | Blessed are those who weep now (v.21) | Comforted; will laugh then | BLAMING | Don't judge others (7:1-6) | Our judgment measured back to us (7:2) |
| STEADFASTNESS | Blessed are those persecuted for righteousness (v.10) | | Kingdom of heaven | CAPITULATION | Enter by narrow gate; avoid broad way (7:13-14) | Destruction (7:13) |
| TRUSTING | Reviled, denounced falsely for Christ's Name (v.11) | Blessed are you when hated for Christ's sake (v.22) | Same as the prophets | WORLDLINESS | Don't worry about food, clothing & shelter (6:25-34) | Same as Gentiles (7:32) |

Rightly Dividing the Lord's Commandments

On many Sundays in the Orthodox lectionary, we see a pattern focusing on the basics of the Christian Faith. One common thread on those Sundays is the Lord's Commandment (called the Greatest Commandment) which is "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and strength and your neighbor as yourself". This was used as a creed in the 1st Century Synagogue worship, is fundamental to the Old Testament Law (Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18) and on this simple commandment hang all the Law and the Prophets (Matthew 22:36-40, Matthew 7:12). The Ten Commandments represent further detailing of the implications of the Greatest Commandment. Yet as Matthew 5:18 states: "Till heaven and earth pass away, one yod (smallest Hebrew letter) or one piece of a Hebrew letter will by no means pass from the Law till all is fulfilled". Thus, the Greatest Commandment (and the Ten Commandments) has not been tossed overboard just because we've received Grace and the Holy Spirit (compare Romans 6:15ff). Instead, it has been clarified.

All this aptly applies to the Fathers of the Church, since they are the ones that are charged with preserving, teaching and rightly dividing the Lord's Commandments. "Whoever does (these commandments) and teaches them shall be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven" (Matthew 5:19).

The Twelve Apostles and the Church Fathers have had to continue rightly dividing the Lord's commandments ever since. For example, at the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15), they had to rightly divide the Word of God being revealed to the Gentiles. Obviously some changes were needed once Israel ceased to exist as a sovereign nation - which the Lord knew was coming. Also, once He, as the Lamb of God, was offered as the perfect sacrifice once for all, some changes in Mosaic Law rituals were needed also. The way this breaks down is thus: we do not quit offering sacrifices; it just takes different forms. For example, we offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is the fruit of our lips (Hebrews 13:15). And we present our own bodies as a living sacrifice similar to the whole burnt offering (Romans 12:1). The Epistle lesson for the 6th Sunday after Pentecost goes into this in more detail.

In Matthew 5, the Lord gave examples on how the Mosaic Law should be "rightly divided"; these are summarized in Table III. Each of the expansions or clarifications of the Law in Table III leads one in the direction of loving the Lord our God with all our heart, soul and strength and our neighbor as ourselves. Looking at each of these in more detail:

Murder: Most Christians today would agree that it's wrong to murder, to commit adultery and to lie under oath. Except for adultery, there's even civil penalties for doing so. But few Christians today understand that refusal to reconcile with one's brother is akin to murder. This is why the Fathers of the Church set up the Embrace of Peace before the Lord's Supper to guard against this.

**TABLE III
THE MOSAIC LAW - RIGHTLY DIVIDED**

| COMMANDMENT | RIGHTLY DIVIDED |
|---|---|
| Do not murder (6 th of 10 Commandments) | Anger at or ridicule of one's brother or refusal to reconcile is equivalent to murder (Matthew 5:21-26) |
| Do not commit adultery (7 th of 10 Commandments) | Lust of the eyes and divorcing one's spouse is equivalent to adultery (Matthew 5:27-53) |
| Do not lie under oath (9 th of 10 Commandments) | Do not lie at all; oaths are irrelevant (Matthew 5:33-37; James 5:12) |
| Just recompense for various evils (eye for eye, etc.) | Do not resist an evil person but be generous to him (Matthew 5:38-42) |
| Hate and maintain distance from treacherous arch-enemies that persecuted Israel | Love your enemies and bless those who curse you (Matthew 5:43-48) |

Adultery: Similarly with adultery, which is so common place today. Many Christians today have great difficulty guarding their hearts against the lust broadcast by the media. To counter this, the Church Fathers encourage us to fast with the eyes as well as the stomach at the various Church fasts. [See Gospel lesson for the 3rd Sunday after Pentecost which speaks of the eye as the lamp of the body.]

An Eye for an Eye: The aspects of the Mosaic Law referred to in Matthew 5:38-48 applied largely to Israel as a nation, but came to be used in personal relations also. For example, the expression "eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth" referred to Old Testament justice and appears three times in the Pentateuch:

| "Eye For Eye" Reference | Circumstances in Reference |
|---|---|
| Innocent bystanders Exodus 21:22-25 | If a pregnant woman was injured by two men fighting, the one who caused the injury was penalized according to her injury or her child's injury. |
| Injuring one's neighbor Leviticus 24:19-30 | A man who maliciously injured his neighbor was penalized by the same wounds. |
| False witnesses Deuteronomy 19:16-21 | If a man falsely accused his neighbor of a crime, the penalty he sought for his neighbor was applied to the accuser. |

These are not necessarily bad laws, but they are impractical to enforce if Israel doesn't exist as a nation.

Arch-enemies: Similarly with regard to the treacherous arch-enemies of Israel: Ammon and Moab (Deuteronomy 23:3-6). These two countries derived from Lot through incest with his two daughters (Genesis 19:30-38) and they had hired the Prophet Baalam to curse Israel in the wilderness. Not to be treated the same were Edom (descendants of Esau) because he was a brother and Egypt because Israel was an alien in his land (Deuteronomy 23:7-8). This also does not apply if Israel doesn't exist as a nation.

However, the Church has become the Israel of God (Galatians 6:16). Paul spoke about how he and those Apostles with him were always carrying about in their bodies the dying of Jesus (2 Corinthians 4:10). They were afflicted, persecuted, struck down, etc., such that their being delivered over to death worked life in the church (2 Corinthians 4:9-12). Matthew 5:38-48 says the same thing, and this has especially applied to the Fathers of the Church over the last 2000 years.

Representing the High Priest

December 6, 2011
Revision C

EPISTLE LESSON: Hebrews 7:26-8:5

The Lord had given to the Twelve “the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven: Whatever they bind on earth shall be, having been bound in heaven; and whatever they loose on earth shall be, having been loosed in heaven” (Matthew 16:19). Thus if one brother should sin against another, if they cannot resolve their differences they can take it to the Church. If the brother who was sinning “refuses to hear the Church, he was to be treated like a heathen and a tax collector; for whatever the Church binds on earth shall be having been bound in heaven, and whatever the Church looses on earth shall be having been loosed in heaven” (Matthew 18:18, see also John 20:23). Thus the Body of Christ, the Church, represents the Head of the Body in carrying out the Commandments of her Lord. By “commandments” here is meant every word that proceeds from the mouth of God, and is not limited to ten in number. In this way “man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God” (Deuteronomy 8:3, Matthew 4:4, John 4:32-38).

The Fathers of the Church are the successors to the Twelve Apostles in this role of binding and loosing. And it goes farther than just judging between one brother and another. There is also an aspect where the hierarchs of the Church stand before God like the High Priest in the Old Covenant offering the gifts and sacrifices.

The Epistle text states, “We have such a High Priest (i.e. Christ) who is seated at the Right Hand of the Throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a minister (Greek: *leitourgos* = liturgist) of the holy things and of the true Tabernacle which the Lord erected and not man” (Hebrews 8:1,2). John Chrysostom pointed out that one who is seated does not minister but only one who stands. This therefore means that Christ in His Deity is seated at the Right Hand of the Father (the Majesty), but in His humanity, He ministers (Homily xiv on Hebrews 8).

In this function, He is holy, innocent, undefiled and separate from sinners and does not need to offer up sacrifices for His own sins or for the people, having done this once for all (Hebrews 7:26, 27). But there are other sacrifices besides a sacrifice for sin. For example, under the Old Covenant there were :

| | |
|--------------------|--------------------|
| Sin Offerings | Freewill Offerings |
| Trespass Offerings | Peace Offerings |
| Burnt Offerings | Thank Offerings |
| Meal Offerings | Drink Offerings |

Just because the sin offering has been made once for all does not mean all the others cease also.

Paul encouraged the Romans to present their bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which was their reasonable service (Romans 12:1). This is equivalent to the burnt offering as were the things sent to Paul by the Philippians at the hand of Epaphroditus (Philippians 4:18). Paul encouraged the Hebrews to offer the fruit of their lips as a Thank Offering (Hebrews 13:15). And he said that he was being poured out as a Drink Offering just prior to his martyrdom (2 Timothy 4:6). For more discussion on “sacrifice” in the Church, see the Epistle lesson for the 6th Sunday after Pentecost.

The Epistle text goes on to say that the priests on earth “who offer the gifts according to the Law serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things” (Hebrews 8:4, 5). Of this, Chrysostom said, “What are the heavenly things he speaks of here? The spiritual things. For although they are done on earth, yet nevertheless they are worthy of the Heavens. For when our Lord Jesus Christ lies slain (as a sacrifice), when the Spirit is with us, when He who sits on the Right Hand of the Father is here, when sons are made by the Washing (i.e. baptism), when they are fellow-citizens of those in Heaven, when we have a country and a city and a citizenship there, when we are strangers to things here, how can all these be other than heavenly things? Do not we also who are below utter in concert the same things which the divine choirs of bodiless powers sing above? Is not the altar also heavenly? It has nothing carnal, but all spiritual things become the offerings. The sacrifice does not disperse into ashes or into smoke or into steamy vapor; it makes the things placed there bright and splendid. How again can the rites which we celebrate (i.e. the Eucharist) be other than heavenly?” (Ibid.). Chrysostom went onto say that “the Church is heavenly and is nothing else than heaven” (Ibid.).

All this means that those in the Church who serve at the altar have a responsibility before God regarding the offerings brought by the people. And the hierarchs in the Church have a role similar to the High Priest in the Old Covenant

Shepherds in the Church

December 6, 2011
Revision C

GOSPLE LESSON: John 10:1-16: Christ, the Good Shepherd

In John 10, Jesus described Himself as the Good Shepherd. Some characteristics of the Good Shepherd are:

- He enters the sheepfold by the door (v.2)
- The doorkeeper opens to Him (v.3)
- He leads His sheep out of the sheepfold (v.4)
- His sheep follow Him (vv.4,5)
- He gives His life for the sheep (v.11)
- He does not run when the wolf comes (vv.12,13)
- He knows His sheep and they know Him (v.14)
- He has other sheep that He needs to bring also to make one flock with one Shepherd (v.16).

He also calls Himself the door to the sheepfold (vv.7,9). Chrysostom stated that when He cares for us, the sheep, He calls Himself a shepherd; when He brings us to the Father, He calls Himself a door (Homily LIX on John 10). Another aspect of Christ being the door to the sheepfold comes from shepherding tactics in the ancient Middle East. Sheepfolds were often enclosures made of stone walls topped with thorns. At night, the shepherd himself would often bed down across the only entrance to the sheepfold, his body then being the “door” to the sheepfold (Gower, New Manners and Customs of Bible Times, p. 140).

Those not entering the sheepfold by the door are thieves and robbers (vv.1,8). Chrysostom said of this: “Observe the marks of a robber: (1) that he does not enter openly; (2) that he does not enter according to the Scriptures, for this is the ‘not by the door’. Here also He refers to those who had been before and to those who should be after Him: Antichrist (1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3) and the false christs (Matthew 24:24, Mark 13:22), Judas and Theudas (Acts 5:36) and whatever others there have been of the same kind. And with good cause He calls the Scriptures ‘a door’, for they bring us to God and open to us the knowledge of God; they make the sheep, they guard them, and do not allow the wolves to come in after them (Ibid.).

On the other hand, Christ was always referring to the Scriptures, because they testified of Him (John 5:39). He called Moses as a witness to what He said, but the Jewish leaders didn’t really believe Moses; they just gave lip service to him (John 5:43-47; 7:18-24). Chrysostom made a case for Moses as the doorkeeper to the sheepfold (Ibid.). Similarly Christ called the Prophets as witnesses (John 6:45, Luke 24:25, 18:31, 13:28-34, 11:47-51), but they wouldn’t believe them either.

The Scribes and Pharisees “climbed up some other way” (v.1) to get into the sheepfold. They interpreted the Law such that they could avoid honoring their father and mother (Matthew 15:3-6) and taught as doctrines the commandments of men (Matthew 15:9, Isaiah 29:13 LXX). They did not keep the Law and sought to murder Jesus who did (John 7:19).

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Judas and Theudas were referred to by Garmaliel as some nationalist-minded revolutionaries who were caught, executed and had their followers dispersed (Acts 5:36-37). These did not enter by the door either, and when they were dead, people quit believing in them.

Jesus, on the other hand, did not advocate a revolt and when the people wanted to make Him king, He departed (John 6:15). When they tried to corner Him about paying tribute to Caesar, He said to pay it (Matthew 22:17-22, 17:24-27). He taught consistently that His Kingdom was not of this world, and if it were, His servants would fight (John 18:36, Matthew 26:51-53).

Continuing with the analogy of the sheepfold, it was common for a shepherd to know each sheep and to call each sheep by name. The sheep were given names by the shepherd based on one of the individual sheep's characteristics. In this way, a shepherd could be caring for more than one flock and could easily separate them when called upon to do so (Gower, *Ibid.*, p. 141). The sheep also recognize the voice of the shepherd and are comfortable with him. They don't follow just anyone's voice (John 10:5).

EPISTLE LESSON: Hebrews 13:7-21: Hierarchs as Shepherds:

This Epistle reading from Hebrews begins: "Remember those leading you who spoke to you the Word of God, looking at the outcome of their conduct, imitate their faith" (Hebrews 13:7). Those leading the sheep are mentioned again: "Obey those leading you and submit to them, for they watch out for your souls as those who must give account; that they may do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be profitless to you" (Hebrews 13:17). The word "leading" (Greek: *hegeomai*) is used elsewhere. For example, Joseph was described as leading Egypt and all Pharaoh's household (Acts 7:10) and Judah called Barsabbas with Silas were leading men among the brethren (Acts 15:22), where they were also prophets (Acts 15:32).

Paul had referred to the "leading men" among the Hebrews earlier also asking them to: "Pursue peace with all people and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14). At the end of the Epistle, he said again, "Greet all those leading you and all the saints. Those from Italy (where Paul was when he wrote Hebrews) greet you" (Hebrews 13:24). To the Thessalonians, Paul said "Now we ask you, brothers, to know (i.e. appreciate) those laboring among you and ruling (Greek: *proistemi*) over you in the Lord and admonishing you, and esteem them very highly in love because of their work" (1 Thessalonians 5:12, 13).

Writing to the Hebrews was a much touchier situation than to the Gentile Churches, because of the strong desire of those in Jerusalem to keep all the details of the Mosaic Law. The Council of Jerusalem in 48 AD had sent a decree around to all the Gentile Churches saying that they did not need to be circumcised and to keep the details of the Law. The Council did say that the Gentiles should abstain (1) from things offered to idols (2) from blood and things strangled and (3) from fornication (Acts 15:22-29). But the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem did keep the Law in all its details and were very zealous to do so (Acts 21:20). But they assumed that Paul taught the Jews abroad that the Jews didn't have to keep the Law. To demonstrate that this was not the case, James (the Bishop of Jerusalem and brother of Jesus) advised Paul to join with four other Jewish Christians in completing their Nazarite vows (Acts 21:21-25).

The above from Acts 21 occurred about 58 AD; Hebrews was written from Italy either c. 62 AD when Paul was under house-arrest (Acts 28:30-31) or c. 67 AD when Paul was chained in prison just prior to his death (2 Timothy 1:16, 4:6). Paul's reference to being restored to them (Hebrews 13:19) and coming to see them with Timothy, who had just been freed (Hebrews 13:23) suggests the earlier date. But there still appears to be a tension that exists between Paul and the Hebrews.

Paul referred to this tension in this Epistle reading: “We have an altar (i.e. in the Church) from which those who serve the Tabernacle (i.e. the Temple in Jerusalem) have no authority to eat” (v.10). By “the altar”, he is referring to the Lord’s Table (1 Corinthians 10:21, 11:24-29). Chrysostom spoke of this as follows: “Not as the Jewish (ordinances) are those among us, as it is not lawful even for the High Priest to partake of them. We then have ordinances as well and we do serve them very earnestly too, not sharing them even with the (Jewish) priests themselves (Homily XXXIII on Hebrews 13). However, Paul said, just as Jesus was crucified outside of the city gates and just as the animal sacrifices are burned outside the camp, let us be outgoing and bear His reproach outside the camp as we go in and out among the Jews in Jerusalem (vv.11-13). Instead of the animal sacrifices, “let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God; this is the fruit of our lips, confessing His Name” (v.15). “Do not forget to do good and to share; for with such sacrifices God is well pleased” (v.16).

Their Jewish brethren were very preoccupied with all the Mosaic Law, which included kosher foods and meat according to Leviticus 11. Referring to this, Paul said, “It is good that the heart is confirmed by Grace, not with foods which have not profited those who have been occupied with them” (v.9). Paul advised they not be carried away with various and strange teachings concerning the interpretation of Leviticus 11, where some of this interpretation was “the commandments of men” (Matthew 15:9, Isaiah 29:13 LXX). After all, the Lord had said Himself, “It’s not what goes into a man’s mouth that defiles him, but what comes out of his mouth” (Matthew 15:11).

Obeying the Hierarchs

Paul wrote to Timothy regarding the qualifications for bishops (Greek: *episkopos*) and how they need to be able to rule (Greek: *proistemi*) his own household well among other things (1 Timothy 3:1-7). Paul also said, “Let the presbyters (Greek: *presbuteros* = elder) who rule (Greek: *proistemi*) well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those laboring in the Word and teaching (1 Timothy 5:17). To the Hebrews, he said, “Obey those leading (Greek: *hegeomai*) you and submit to them, for they watch out for your souls as those who must give account; that they may do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be profitless to you” (v.17).

Chrysostom spoke of three evils relating to hierarchs:

- No hierarch exists
- People disobedient to their hierarch
- The hierarch, himself, is evil

Regarding the first, he said, “Anarchy is an evil and the occasion of many calamities, and the source of disorder and confusion. For as, if you take away the leader from a chorus, the chorus will not be in tune and in order; and if from a phalanx of an army you remove the commander, the evolutions will no longer be made in time and order; and if from a ship you take away the helmsman, you will sink the vessel; so too if from a flock you remove the shepherd, you have overthrown and destroyed all. Anarchy then is an evil and a cause of ruin (Homily xxxiv on Hebrews 13).

Regarding disobedient people, he said, “No less an evil also is the disobedience to rulers. For it comes again to the same thing. For a people not obeying a ruler is like one which has none; and perhaps even worse. For in the former case they have at least an excuse for disorder, but no longer in the latter; but they are punished” (Ibid.).

Regarding evil hierarchs, there is quite a predicament. Chrysostom said, “No small evil it is, but even a far worse evil than anarchy. For it is better to be led by no one, than to be led by one who is evil. For the former are oftentimes saved and oftentimes are in peril, but the latter will be altogether in peril, being led to the pit (of destruction)”.

“How then does Paul say, ‘obey those leading you and submit to them’ (v.17) and ‘Looking at the outcome of their conduct, imitate their faith’ (v.7)? What then, when he is wicked should we obey?” (Ibid.).

In this respect, Chrysostom distinguishes between whether the hierarch is wicked in faith or in life. That is, does he teach heresy and is therefore wicked in faith, or does he have a corrupt life to go with a correct faith? “If indeed he is wicked in regard to faith, flee and avoid him; not only if he be a man, but even if he were an angel come down from heaven” (Ibid.). For Paul said, “Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works” (2 Corinthians 11:14,15). Similar to the “angel of light” is a hierarch with a heretical faith: “(the evil) is not manifest to all, and the wicked (hierarch) will not shrink from teaching it” (Ibid).

If the hierarch is wicked in having a corrupt life, Chrysostom advised first to avoid being overly curious to ferret this out. Chrysostom took his cue from Christ in his response to the Scribes and Pharisees. He had said that “The Scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do; but do not do according to their works; for they say (what is right) but do not do it” (Matthew 23:2, 3). In this regard, it would be hard to imagine a more corrupt life than that of the Scribes and Pharisees. They openly plotted to murder the Lord and persecute the Apostles (Matthew 26:4, Acts 7:56-60, 9:1-2). They devoured widows’ houses in the name of upholding the Mosaic Law (Matthew 23:14). They tithed on all their income, but neglected justice and mercy and faith (Matthew 23:23).

The same applies to hierarchs with a corrupt life. Chrysostom said, “They have the dignity of office, but are of an unclean life. Do however attend to their words, but not to their life. For as regards their character no one would be harmed thereby. How is this? Both because their characters are manifest to all; and also because, though he were ten thousand times as wicked, he will never teach what is wicked” (Ibid.).

In this respect, Chrysostom applied the Lord’s words, “Judge not that you be not judged” (Matthew 7:1) to a hierarch with a corrupt life since this applies to one’s life and not to one’s faith. The words that follow he said, make this plain: “And why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye?” (Matthew 7:3).

The Responsibility of Hierarchs

Chrysostom applied the toughest standards to the hierarchs themselves. “Let those who rule also hear, and not only those who are under their rule: that as the subjects ought to be obedient, so also the rulers ought to be watchful and sober. The hierarch watches; he imperils his own head. He is subject to the punishments of your sins, and for your sake he is agreeable to what is so fearful and are you slothful, indifferent and at ease?” Taking on the role of a hierarch, Chrysostom saw as taking on “so great an abyss of punishments”. He said, “You have to give

account of all over whom you rule, women, children, and men; into so great a fire do you put your head. I marvel if any of the rulers can be saved, when in the face of such a threat, and of the present indifference.” “For men ought to fear and to tremble, both because of conscience and because of the burden of the office” (Ibid.). This is why Paul said (v.17) ‘That (the hierarchs) may do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be profitless to you’.

Chrysostom also brought up the case of a hierarch who is despised for no good reason by the people under his care. “He ought not to avenge himself because his great revenge is to weep and lament. When we lament for our own sins, we draw God to us; shall we not much rather do this when we lament for the arrogance and scornfulness of others? The hierarch’s lamenting is worse than any revenge. For when of himself he profits nothing by lamenting, he calls on the Lord. And as in the case of a teacher or nurse, when the child does not listen to him, one is called in who will treat the child more severely; so also in this case” (Ibid.).

Paul was regarded this way by the Hebrews. He said to them, “Pray for us; for we are confident that we have a good conscience, in all things desiring to live honorably. But I especially urge you to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner” (vv.18, 19). Chrysostom said of this, “You see that he used these apologies, as writing to persons grieved with him, as to those who turned away, who were disposed as toward a transgressor, not enduring even to hear his name (Acts 21:21). He then asked from those who hated him what all others ask from those who love them; i.e. their prayers for him. Not as an enemy, nor as an adversary do I write these things but as a friend.” Paul was thus writing as “one who loved them greatly, and that not simply but with all earnestness (Romans 9:1-5). The earnest desire to come to them (vv.19, 23) is the mark of one conscious to himself of nothing wrong” (Ibid.).

APPENDIX I

BIOGRAPHIES FROM THE PROLOGUE

John Chrysostom, Patriarch of Constantinople

He was born in Antioch in the year 347, his father's name being Secundus and his mother's Anthusa. Studying Greek philosophy, John became disgusted with Hellenic paganism and turned to the Christian faith as the one and all-embracing truth. John was baptized by Meletius, Patriarch of Antioch, and, after that, his parents were also baptized. After their death, John became a monk and began to live in strict asceticism. He wrote a book: "On the Priesthood", after which the holy Apostles John and Peter appeared to him, prophesying for him great service, great grace and also great suffering. When the time came for him to be ordained priest, an angel of God appeared at the same time to Patriarch Flavian (Meletius's successor) and to John himself. When the Patriarch ordained him, a shining white dove was seen above John's head. Renowned for his wisdom, his asceticism and the power of his words, John was, at the desire of Emperor Arcadius, chosen as Patriarch of Constantinople. He governed the Church for six years as Patriarch with unequalled zeal and wisdom, sending missionaries to the pagan Celts and Scythians and purging the Church of simony, deposing many bishops who were given to this vice. He extended the Church's charitable works, wrote a rite for the Holy Liturgy, put heretics to shame, denounced the Empress Eudoxia, interpreted the Scriptures with his golden mind and tongue and left to the Church many precious books of sermons. The people glorified him; the jealous loathed him; the Empress twice had him sent into exile. He spent three years in exile, and died on Holy Cross Day, September 14th, 407, in a place called Comana in Armenia. The holy Apostles John and Peter again appeared to him at the time of his death, and also the holy martyr Basiliscus (see May 22nd), in whose church he received Communion for the last time. "Glory to God for everything!" were his last words, and with them the soul of Chrysostom the Patriarch entered into Paradise.

Nicolas the Wonderworker, Archbishop of Myra

This saint, famed throughout the entire world today, was the only son of his eminent and wealthy parents, Theophanes and Nona, citizens of Patara in Lycia. They dedicated to God the only son He gave them. St. Nicolas was instructed in the spiritual life by his uncle Nicolas, Bishop of Patara, and became a monk at "New Sion", a monastery founded by his uncle. On the death of his parents, Nicolas distributed all the property he inherited to the poor and kept nothing back for himself. As a priest in Patara, he was known for his charitable works, fulfilling the Lord's words: "Let not your left hand know what your right hand does" (Matthew 6:3). When he embraced a life of solitude and silence, thinking to live in that way until his death, a voice from on high came to him: "Nicolas, set about your work among the people if you desire to receive a crown from Me." Immediately after that, by God's wondrous providence, he was chosen as archbishop of the city of Myra in Lycia. Merciful, wise and fearless, Nicolas was a true shepherd to his flock. He was cast into prison during the persecutions of Diocletian and Maximian, but even there continued to instruct the people in the Law of God. He was present at the First Ecumenical Council in Nicaea in 325, and, in his zeal, struck Arius with his hand. For this act, he was removed from the Council and from his episcopal duties, until some of the chief hierarchs had a vision of our Lord Christ and His most holy Mother showing their sympathy with Nicolas.

This wonderful saint was a defender of the truth of God, and was ever a spirited champion of justice among the people. On two occasions, he saved three men from undeserved sentences of death. Merciful, trustworthy and loving right, he walked among the people like an angel of God. People considered him a saint even during his lifetime, and invoked his aid when in torment or distress. He would appear both in dreams and in reality to those who called upon him for help, responding speedily to them, whether close at hand or far away. His face would shine with light as Moses' did aforetime, and his mere presence among people would bring solace, peace and goodwill. In old age, he sickened at a slight illness, and went to his rest in the Lord after a life full of labor and fruitful toil. He now enjoys eternal happiness in the Kingdom of heaven, continuing to help the faithful on earth by his miracles, and to spread the glory of God. He entered into rest on December 6th, 343.

Basil the Great, Archbishop of Caesarea

St. Basil was born in the reign of the Emperor Constantine, in about 330. While still unbaptized, he spent fifteen years in Athens studying philosophy, rhetoric, astronomy and other contemporary secular disciplines. Among his fellow-students were Gregory the Theologian and Julian, later the apostate emperor. When already of mature years, he was baptized in the Jordan together with his former tutor Evulios. He was Bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia for nearly ten years, and died at the age of fifty.

A great champion of Orthodoxy, a great torch of moral purity and zeal for the Faith, a great theological mind, a great builder and pillar of the Church of God, Basil fully deserved his title "the Great". In the Office for his Feast, he is referred to as a bee of the Church of Christ, bringing honey to the faithful but stinging those in heresy. Many of the writings of this Father of the Church have survived -- theological, apologetic, on asceticism and on the Canons. There is also the Liturgy that bears his name. This Liturgy is celebrated ten times in the year: on January 1st, on the Eves of Christmas and the Theophany, on every Sunday in the Great Fast with the exception of Palm Sunday, and on the Thursday and Saturday in Great Week.

St. Basil departed this life peacefully on January 1st, 379, and entered into the Kingdom of Christ.

Father Antony the Great

He was an Egyptian, born about 250 in a village called Quemen-el-Arons near Heracleopolis. After the death of his rich and noble parents, he shared his inherited possessions with his sister, who was still in her minority, made sure that she was cared for, gave away his half of the inheritance to the poor and, at the age of twenty, consecrated himself to the life of asceticism that he had desired from childhood. At first he lived near his own village but then, in order to escape the disturbance of men, went off into the desert, on the shores of the Red Sea, where he spent twenty years as a hermit in company with no one but God, in unceasing prayer, pondering and contemplation, patiently undergoing inexpressible demonic temptations. His fame spread through the whole world and around him gathered many disciples whom he, by word and example, placed on the path of salvation. In eighty-five years of ascetic life, he went only twice to Alexandria; the first time to seek martyrdom during a time of persecution of the Church, and the second at the invitation of St. Athanasius, to refute the Arians' slanderous allegations that he too was a follower of the Arian heresy. He departed this life at the age of 105, leaving behind a whole army of disciples and followers. And, although Antony was unlettered he was, as a

counselor and teacher, one of the most learned men of his age, as also was Athanasius the Great. When some Hellenic philosophers tried to test him with literary learning, Antony shamed them with the question: "Which is older, the understanding or the book? And which of these is the source of the other?" The shamed philosophers dispersed, for they saw that they had only book-learning without understanding, while Antony had understanding. Here was a man who had attained perfection insofar as man is able on earth. Here was an educator of educators and teacher of teachers, who for a whole eight-five years perfected himself, and only thus was able to perfect many others. Full of years and great works, Antony entered into rest in the Lord in the year 356.

Athanasius the Great, Archbishop of Alexandria

Born in Alexandria in 296, he had from childhood an inclination to the spiritual life. He was a deacon with Archbishop Alexander and accompanied him to Nicaea, to the First Ecumenical Council in 325. At this Council, Athanasius became famed for his learning, his devotion and his zeal for Orthodoxy, and contributed very greatly to the containing of the Arian heresy and the strengthening of Orthodoxy. After the death of Alexander, Athanasius was chosen as Archbishop of Alexandria. He remained in his archiepiscopal calling for more than forty years, although he was not on the archiepiscopal throne the whole time. He was persecuted by heretics through almost the whole of his life, particularly by the Emperors Constantius, Julian and Valens, by Bishop Eusebius of Nicomedia and many others, and by the heretic Arius and his followers. He was forced to hide from his persecutors in a well, a grave, private houses and the deserts. Twice he was forced to flee to Rome. Only just before his death did he have a peaceful period as a good shepherd with his flock, which truly loved him. There are few saints who have been so callously slandered and so criminally persecuted as St. Athanasius. But his great soul endured all with patience for the love of Christ and at last emerged victorious from all these terrible and lengthy struggles. He often went to St. Antony for advice and moral support, revering him as his spiritual father. He suffered greatly for the truth, until the Lord gave him rest in His kingdom as His faithful servant, in the year 373.

Cyril, Archbishop of Alexandria

He was of noble birth and a close kinsman of Theophilus, Patriarch of Alexandria, after whose death he was chosen as Patriarch. He fought three fierce battles in the course of his life: against the Novatianist heretics, against Nestorius and against the Jews of Alexandria. The Novatianists began in Rome, and were so called after their leader, the heretic priest Novatian. They were filled with pride at their virtues, went about dressed in white, banned second marriages and declared that one must not pray for those who had committed mortal sin nor receive back into the Church those who had once fallen away, however deeply they might repent. Cyril overcame them and drove them out of Alexandria, together with their bishop. The battle with the Jews was harder and bloodier. The Jews had been in the ascendant in Alexandria right from the time that Alexander the Great founded the city. Their hatred towards the Christians was vicious and mindless. They killed Christians by treachery, by poison and by crucifixion. After a long and difficult struggle, Cyril succeeded in inducing the Emperor to drive the Jews out of Alexandria. His battle, however, against Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople, was resolved at the Third Ecumenical Council in Ephesus. Cyril himself presided at this council, and also represented Pope Celestine of Rome at his request, he being prevented by old age from attending the Council. Nestorius was condemned, anathematized and exiled by the Emperor to the eastern borders of the Empire, where he died. After the end of these battles, Cyril lived in peace and

guided Christ's flock with zeal. He went to the Lord in the year 444. It is said that he composed the hymn: "Hail, Mother of God and Virgin."

Gregory the Theologian, Archbishop of Constantinople

Born in Nazianzus of a Greek father (who later became a Christian and a bishop) and a Christian mother, he studied in Athens before his baptism with St. Basil the Great and Julian the Apostate. He often foretold to Julian that he would be an apostate and a persecutor of the Church, and so it came to pass. Gregory was especially influenced by his mother, Nonna. He was baptized when he had completed his studies. St. Basil consecrated him bishop of Sasima, and the Emperor Theodosius quickly called him to the vacant archiepiscopal throne of Constantinople. His works were manifold, the best-known being his theological writings, for which he received the title "the Theologian". He is particularly famed for the depth of his Sermons on the Holy Trinity. He also wrote against the heretic Macedonius, who taught wrongly of the Holy Spirit (that the Spirit was a creature of God), and against Apollinarius who taught that Christ did not have a human soul but that His divinity was in place of His soul. He also wrote against the Emperor Julian the Apostate, his sometime schoolfellow. In the year 381, when a quarrel broke out in the Council concerning his election as archbishop, he withdrew himself, declaring: "Those who deprive us of the (archiepiscopal) throne cannot deprive us of God." He then left Constantinople and went to Nazianzus, remaining there in retirement, prayer and the writing of instructive books until his death. And, although he was in weak health all his life, he lived to the age of seventy. He was, and remains, a great and wonderful light of the Orthodox Church, as much for the meekness and purity of his character as for the unsurpassable depth of his mind. He entered into rest in the Lord in the year 389.

Spiridon of Tremythous

The island of Cyprus was both the birthplace and the place where this glorious saint served the Church. Spiridon was born of simple parents, farmers, and he remained simple and humble until his death. He married in his youth and had children, but when his wife died he devoted himself completely to the service of God. Because of his exceptional piety, he was chosen as bishop of the city of Tremythous. Yet even as a bishop he did not change his simple way of living, handling his livestock and cultivating his land himself. He used very little of the fruits of his labor for himself; instead, he distributed a greater share to the needy. He manifested great miracles by God's power: he brought down rain in time of drought, stopped the flow of a river, raised several people from the dead, healed Emperor Constantius of a grave illness, saw and heard angels of God, foresaw future events, discerned the secrets of men's hearts, converted many to the true Faith, and did much else. He took part in the First Ecumenical Council in Nicaea [325], and he brought many heretics back to Orthodoxy by his simple and clear expositions of the Faith as well as by his mighty miracles. He was so simply dressed that once, when he wanted to enter the imperial court at the invitation of the emperor, a soldier, thinking that he was a beggar, struck him on the face. Meek and guileless, Spiridon turned the other cheek to him. He glorified God through many miracles, and was of benefit, not only to many individuals but also to the whole Church of God. He entered into rest in the Lord in the year 348. His miracle-working relics rest on the island of Corfu, and even today they glorify God with many miracles.

**APPENDIX II
OLD TESTAMENT READINGS FOR HIERARCHS**

| | |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| John Chrysostom, November 13 | |
| | |
| Proverbs | 1:23 |
| | 3:13-16, 34 |
| | 8:6, 34, 35, 4, 12, 14, 17, 5-9 |
| | 10:7, 6, 31, 32 |
| | 11:4, 7, 19 |
| | 13:2, 9 |
| | 14:33 |
| | 15:2, 4 |
| | 22:11 |
| | 29:2 |
| Ecclesiastes | 8:1 |
| Wisdom (LXX) | 1:8 |
| | 2:1, 10-17, 19-22 |
| | 4:1, 14 |
| | 6:11-18 |
| | 7:15-16, 21-22, 26-27, 29-30 |
| | 8:2-4, 7, 9, 17-18, 21 |
| | 9:1-5, 10-11, 14 |
| | 10:9, 10, 12 |
| | 15:1 |
| | 16:13 |
| | |
| Nicolas of Myra, December 6 | |
| Proverbs | 1:23 |
| | 3:13-16 |
| | 8:6, 34, 35, 4, 12, 14, 17, 5-9 |
| | 10:7, 6 |
| | 10:31-11:12 |
| | 15:4 |
| Wisdom (LXX) | 4:7-15 |
| | |
| Antony the Great, January 17 | |
| Wisdom (LXX) | 3:1-9 |
| | 4:7-15 |
| | 5:5-6:3 |

| | |
|---|-----------------------------|
| Athanasius & Cyril of Alexandria, January 18 | |
| Wisdom | 3:1-9 |
| Deuteronomy | 1:8-11, 15-17, 10:14-21 |
| Gregory the Theologian, January 25 | |
| Proverbs | 3:13-16 |
| | 8:6, 34, 35, 4, 12, 17, 5-9 |
| | 10:7, 6 |
| Wisdom | 4:7-15 |
| Chrysostom, Basil & Gregory, January 30 | |
| Wisdom | 3:1-9 |
| Deuteronomy | 1:8-11, 15-17, 10:14-21 |