



## **Thou Shalt Have No Other Gods!**

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“There were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud... And Mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke” (Ex 19:16,18). And God spake all these words, saying, I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me (Ex 20:1-3). But both thunders and lightnings failed to prevent the stiff-necked people from idolatry, and the Lord God, a jealous God, laments through His prophet, “My people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water” (Jer 2:13).

But surely we, the new Israel, the Christian people, know that our meek Savior tells us the very same thing? He says it without thunder and lightning, but surely therefore we cannot help but hear His loving voice? “No man”, as Christ said, “can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon” (Mt 6:24). “Know ye not,” writes St James the Apostle, brother of God, “that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God. Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?” (Jas 4:4-5). Even before baptism, we all renounced the evil one and joined ourselves to Christ alone. But does all this convince many of the immutable truth that at any time it is possible to worship God alone? We all renounced the evil one and joined ourselves to Christ. But look around

the Christian world and see if it is the One God Whom people worship. Should not the spirit of all who love God be stirred, like unto the great Paul the Apostle, seeing that the life of many contemporary Christians is full of idols, like the pagan Athenians in the time of the holy Apostle Paul? (Acts 17:16)

Life is full of idols; now we see both idols and idolaters everywhere. However, you will not see idols made of stone, gold and silver. Indeed, it would be strange to find such primitive idolatry in our enlightened age. But a subtle idolatry, often unconscious or disguised as serving the true God, such even more dangerous idolatry has again spread over the face of the earth like a wave of mud. This idolatry manifests itself in many different ways, all of which are invariably sad and sorrowful for the Christian world.

The Apostle Paul speaks of ancient idolatry in his epistle to Romans. "When they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened" (Rom 1:21). The pagans had knowledge about God, but that knowledge did not touch their lives. In their lives they did not praise or thank God, Whom they had known with their minds. Their lives were not centered on seeking God, and there was a gap between faith and life. But cannot the same thing quite literally be said about our time? Those who live only for God and with God are so rare nowadays! Nowadays can many sincerely repeat these great words of the great Apostle, "yet not I, but Christ liveth in me?" (Gal 2:20). Today God is not praised in the lives of Christians. Ask our contemporaries, how do they live, what do they live for? What is the most important thing in their lives? They will say it is family, work, social activities, business. A few will mention science, some – pleasure, personal well-being. But will there be any who will say that the most important thing in their life is God, the Church, the salvation of their soul, eternal life? No, hardly anyone will recall all this, the one thing needful. Christ has been completely driven out of human life, although many do not actually persecute Him openly. In a way, people would be sad to abandon Christ completely, but they still do not love Him enough to reject all other gods for His sake. So they do all they can to retain all the worldly idols, to worship both Christ and Belial. They share their lives between many gods. The greatest part of their life is given over to worshiping all manner of idols in their hearts, and only the most insignificant part is devoted to the hasty and hurried worship of the true God. Imagine the big house of a busy person. There are many huge offices and studies, where the owner spends more or less whole days. But somewhere, in a corner, there is a very small room with icons. Rarely, all too rarely, and hurriedly, the owner calls in, but immediately runs out, rushing away to his "business". This is how the whole life of the contemporary Christian is organized. He wastes his time in futility. He is busy all day long, with no free time at all. Very rarely, once a week, once a month, or even once a year, he calls in at the house of God. But he has nothing to do there, so he hurries back to his "business".

What is life in Christ nowadays? And who even talks about such life now? Now you only hear about "satisfying your religious needs" or "carrying out your religious duties." This said, such needs and duties are both, in fact, surprisingly few, compared to any other needs or duties. "Satisfying your religious needs..." "Carrying out your religious duties..." Tell me, how can such words be called anything but blasphemy? Is not the terrible apostasy concealed behind these words clear and obvious? The Christian faith cannot occupy just a tiny corner of human life, (;) it can only be life itself. Think of all the saints of God. Could they in their holiness possibly have uttered or thought words like those? Were their lives anything but walking with God (Gen 5:24, 6:9)? Some say that faith in Christ cannot influence our lives. It cannot indeed have any influence, because it is not given enough space in life. But faith in Christ did fill the hearts of the saints of God with ineffable joy, bliss and peace, for they lived for God alone. To those who serve God alone, the spirit living in them gives more grace (Jas: 4:6) which makes all illusory gifts of this world seem worthless and miserable. Those who wholly devoted themselves to God acquire the eternal treasure which "neither moth nor rust doth corrupt" and thieves cannot steal (Mt 6:20), which remains with them even after death. But what about our contemporaries, who zealously serve earthly idols, day and night thinking about the worldly, forgetting about the heavenly? What do they gain? What do their idols grant

them? True, their outward life may astonish a frivolous admirer with its wealth, comfort, and luxury. But what inner wretchedness of soul is concealed underneath all this fleeting, short-lived splendor! How dark and troubled are the souls of our contemporaries! It is not merely I who say this, wishing to condemn the idolatrous life of the world. No, even writers who are hostile to God and Holy Church – read them! – portray our daily life in such horribly dark hues. And the best writers, do they not speak about our world, that it is ridiculous to think of living an honest life, holding on to high ideals?

Our contemporaries often say with pride, “I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing.” And he doesn’t know that he is wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked (Rev 3:17). All this is because the faith of Christ has ceased to be life, because people no longer worship God alone, and have created countless idols, idols without souls, who give a spiritual meaning to life, making it meaningful.

Idols are increasingly forcing Christ out of human life. Nowadays, everything concerned with faith is more and more becoming a ‘private matter’, to such an extent that it must always be hidden away in the most secret ‘cell’, as it has and can have no place in life. Nowadays Christianity is seen merely as a private, secret form of piety, but Christian life has been impoverished. Christian life is only possible in the Church; only the Church lives the life of Christ. The Church is the holy community in which the earth rises to the heavens and people are so united in love and like-mindedness that they have one heart and one soul (Acts 4:32). The whole body of the Church “by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love” (Eph 4:16), “till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” (Eph 4:13), and Christ will be in all (Col 3:11; 1 Cor 15:28). That is the true life of Christ! But being part of Christian Church life is only possible for a loving heart which is capable of casting off sinful selfishness and which cherishes the only God of love and defies cold and soulless idols of the world. The serving of idols, on the other hand, always goes together with selfishness, which is why our contemporaries’ hearts that lack love cannot grasp or access all the profound meaningfulness, joy, and beauty of Church life. Our society is therefore ready to leave all Church life to monks and priests alone. They think that they do not have to live according to the Church’s rules. In our society’s opinion, Christ’s commandments and Christian life are only obligatory and necessary for monks and maybe sometimes for priests, while for laypeople everything is possible, good and praiseworthy. Church services must be attended by monks, whereas laypeople may have evening and night ‘vigils’ at places of entertainment instead. Charity is not for laypeople either, politeness alone is enough. Society opts for the marketplace of the tedious world, rushing in the darkness from one glimmering light to another, starving from spiritual famine, eating “the husks that the swine did eat”, and not wanting to “have bread enough and to spare” (Lk 15:16-17) in the house of the Heavenly Father, which is the Holy Orthodox Church. And if some speak of taking part in Church life, they do not mean forming the body of Christ in common charity and spiritual deeds. What they mean is moneymaking and keeping “tables of moneychangers” (Mt 21:12) or fighting for some rights or other. And they want to put their soulless worldly idol in the holy place!

Contemporary idolatry can above all be seen in attitudes to the Church. Many are hardened, speaking evil of the only way of Christ (Acts 19:9), the way of the Church. ‘New paths’ are created bearing (bearing) the name of Christ, but without the Church, ‘near but outside the walls of the Church’. Those ‘new paths’ prove very convenient for those who preserve the name of Christ but worship their favorite idols. That is why all these ‘new paths’ are attractive. They are easy and indulge passions. Only pious dreams, or more often, ugly ones, which have nothing to do with life, remain of the true faith of Christ, which is found in Holy Church, on those paths. The Church offers people the full teaching of Christ. This teaching shows little tolerance of passions, of human selfishness. But on the ‘new paths’ you can choose only what you like from the teaching of Christ and does not get in the way of worshipping idols. The selfsame sad event, so vividly described in the

Book of Acts, is repeated over and over again. Felix the governor listens to the holy Apostle Paul when the latter preaches the faith in Jesus Christ, but when the Apostle starts to speak about temperance and the judgment to come, the nobleman trembles and says, “Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee” (Acts 25:24-25). Is this not literally a common but sad situation nowadays? Now many are also ready to accept the ‘pure’, ‘Gospel’, ‘free’ Christianity, which does not oblige you to do anything, but they furiously reject Holy Church, because the latter speaks of temperance, self-denial, and casting down idols.

In order to dream about Christ at your leisure you do not really need the Church, you can do without it. Only, without the Church, you cannot live a Christian life, but then there are very few who are devoted to such a life. The majority find a semi-pagan life more appealing. Indeed, contemporary idolatry can be seen in the denial of Holy Church.

Idolatry, in this subtle form, has leaked into the Church community like a poison. What else can explain the extraordinary indifference to matters of faith and the Church, which dominates in so-called high and educated society? Do many nowadays feel the living need in their hearts to belong to the Holy Orthodox Church? Do many know about themselves, if they belong to the Church or if they have been already cut off by the invisible judgment of God, like withered branches, which have long borne no spiritual fruit, cut off from the living and blossoming tree of the Church? Many even ask in confusion, what does it mean to belong to the Church? They think that being registered in a book at baptism, coming to church two or three times a year, and taking Holy Communion once every three or four years is enough to belong to the Church. And if you tell them about the duties of every member of the Holy Church, they will reply indignantly, “But we aren’t monks. Do you think Christianity is all about monasticism? Don’t we simply need pray to God? Do we need to reject life with all its joys? Your concept of Christianity is too narrow-minded. Christianity is the religion of freedom...” and other foolish words. There are many different groups which exist to achieve earthly goals, and everyone knows what it means to belong to such groups. A member of such a group plays a very active part in its life and he lives through it. If something is useful for this group, he considers it useful for himself too. A friend of the group is his friend. An enemy of it is his enemy. I will give you an example; although it is not perhaps appropriate to speak of this in a church, but many will understand it with ease. Over the last few years many political parties have appeared in our country. Look how zealous party members are about protecting their party’s interests, how well they know the difference between their own party and others. Should a socialist start spreading monarchist ideas, they will be immediately cast out of the party and all connection with it will be lost. But what about the Church? Its life has nothing to do with us, we do not value it at all, we are used to doing without it. Matters of faith and the salvation of the soul interest few. Few distinguish between Orthodoxy and heresy, truth and delusion. Many avoid talking about Orthodoxy and heretical Western confessions, Catholicism and Lutheranism, but talk only about some general Christianity. To sympathize with a heretic, to be on and take the side of an enemy of the Christian Church, tearing apart the seamless tunic of Christ, is nowadays hardly considered to be a shameful and evil crime. Indeed, is it even thought to be improper? Conversely, the light-minded denial of Church teaching and rules, a mocking of them, and an opposition to the Church hierarchy, – have these not become a sign of good manners? And to be wholly faithful to Holy Orthodoxy and the Holy Church of Christ, to live according to its holy rules, and to obey the Church hierarchy unquestioningly, not from fear but from conscience – are these not clear signs of that backwardness, which is so superstitiously feared by our contemporaries? Alas! To our misfortune and sorrow, all this is so. Heretics, using society’s total ignorance of matters of religion and piety, hiding behind big, but totally empty words, preach the most ridiculous, meaningless and disgusting teachings, while the children of the Church put heretical lies above the Orthodox truth, without even questioning it. They openly call one who has been excommunicated by the Church for his blasphemous heresies a great teacher, hold celebrations in his honor and seek audiences with him and flatter him. Furthermore, they go as far as to vilify those who guard the flock of Christ because they chase away wolves from the sheep who have been entrusted to them by God. The enemies of

the Church shower God's inheritance with endless abuse, which horrifies the soul that loves God and the Church. A merciless war against all of Christ's work has been declared; the enemy ruthlessly uses the most base and shameless means to achieve their unholy ends. And what do the Church's children do? Do they fight back? Do they indignantly and sorrowfully turn away from foolish actions and speeches? Do they start to love the slandered Christ and His Holy Church even more? No! They are even ready to applaud Christ's enemies and cry out with zeal "Crucify Him!" We can go even further than this. We have noticed a sort of spite among believers towards their own Church. It is as if they were happy that enemies shamelessly vilify the Holy Orthodox Church. It is as if they were secretly looking forward to the Church's collapse, so that they will be 'free' from God, from the Church's calling, alone with their beloved idols. We can once more hear the cry, true, most often concealed behind big words, "Get out of the way, turn aside from the path, cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us," as once before "a rebellious people, lying children, children who will not hear the law of the Lord" cried (Is 30:9-11). How else can we explain why the Church's children so eagerly sympathize with the whole anti-Church movement? When ill-disposed people hear something bad about their enemies, they believe it very easily, even fearing to think that it might be a lie. Do we not see the same with attitudes to the Church? The sons of disobedience (Eph 2:2) come up with all kinds of lies about God's Church, holy monasteries, priests and bishops of God, and fill their newspapers and books with these lies. Their falsehood could not be more obvious, yet the Church's children close their eyes to this and are eager to believe blatant lies.

Such an opposition to the Church, even on the part of those who seemingly belong to it, is based on the same idolatry. It is because people do not want to serve God alone that they oppose the Church. If they served God alone, there would not be any opposition to the Church, or even any indifference whatsoever in matters of the faith. But in our idolatrous age opposition to the Church has attained huge proportions and is the greatest tragedy of our time. "All heresies and schisms," says the hieromartyr Cyprian, "result from everything secular and even anti-Church finding support and approval inside the Church itself!" (Letter to Pompeius)

O brethren! May none of you fall according to the same example of disobedience (Heb 4:11). The wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience (Col 3:6; Eph 5:6). Fiery is the indignation which will devour the adversaries (Heb 10:27). These are not my words, not my threats, but those of the holy Apostle Paul. And the prophet says, "God is jealous, and the Lord avenges" (Nahum 1:2). But when you see the sad confusion in the Church community, which results from worshiping other gods, you really want to cry from the bottom of your grieving heart, "Let there be lightning and thunder, let there be again the voice of God, saying 'I am the Lord thy God, thou shalt have no other gods before me! Put away the foreign gods from among you (1 Ki 7:3; 4 Ki 17:35, 37, 38), make no mention of their names (Josh 23:7).

But on this our feast day may the voice of the Lord first of all and louder than all sound out for us, my brothers, my dear sons of the same alma mater, the Moscow Theological Academy. Surely we hear how the first words of the Ten Commandments of Sinai ring out for us especially? Surely it is not hard to know the thoughts that it calls forth within us? First of all, it forces us to think about our present. Thanks to the Lord God, we are in a theological school. Our very field of study does not attract our minds to what is below and only below; no, it speaks of what is above, it beckons us above. As you know, nowadays there are very many fields of study which fill people with much knowledge, but of these studies it is always possible to ask: are they necessary for the salvation of the soul and eternal life? And if they are unnecessary, then what is their use? True, such knowledge may be very convenient for everyday life: we can no longer live without them. We need railways, steamships, the telegraph and the telephone, electric light and much else besides. This is all true. It would be absurd to deny all this. But to judge from the point of view of everyday usefulness is not the highest form of judgment for humanity, especially for Christians, because they hear the word of Christ: For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself? (Lk 9:25). For we walk by faith, not by sight (2 Cor 5:7), not by science. Science is not yet in itself life; in matters of life and death science can only serve Christ or antichrist. The whole tragedy of our age is that

proud semi-science – real science is always humble – meddles in the affairs of others, it wants to teach people how to live. After all, the truths of natural science, mathematics and technology teach us nothing about the answers to questions of salvation and death. Does God exist or not? Does eternal life exist or not? You will not find the answers to these questions if you study the stars, the trees, herbs, stones and metals. You will not find them if you study the destinies of peoples, their wars, their trade, their social life. When nevertheless science starts to tackle such issues, then, looking only below, very quickly and very easily it starts to serve antichrist. Like the ancient murderer, it craftily whispers to people: ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil (Gen 3:5). It is not for nothing that the holy Apostle James calls such wisdom earthly, sensual, devilish (Jas 3:15). Nowadays, this devilish wisdom often declares that the whole cause of our salvation is foolishness. Such wisdom does not lead to salvation and eternal life is completely unknown to it: it knows only the grave and murmurs blindly, unhappily and darkly at the graveside. But who can say of our science that it is not essentially necessary for the salvation of the soul and eternal life? To study the Holy Scriptures, the works of the Holy Fathers, which are filled with the Spirit, to know the lives and feats of the saints of God, to study the wonderful destinies of the Church of Christ – can all this be compared to the construction of factory chimneys, the study of sinful writings, the whole general construction of the contemporary Tower of Babel? Of course not! Nowadays, when earthly wisdom is increasing so much, the need for heavenly and divine wisdom is especially great. Everyone needs the Truth that comes down from above (Jas 3:17); without it people cannot live, however much they bury themselves in earthly vanities. The whole earth calls upon truth and heaven blesses her and all God's works shake and tremble at it (2 Esd 4:36). Today countless demands for that very wisdom, to which our Academy is dedicated, come from all quarters. There is a surplus of workers in the field of earthly wisdom, but there are few, very few in the grace-filled fields of theological study. And this is why the service of theological study and our self-enrichment with its eternal and imperishable treasures is our very calling at the present time! This is alone what we must serve, what we must revere, not kneeling down before the Baal of a foreign knowledge which does little to bring salvation.

But the Holy Apostle warns us of delusion. Who is a wise man and endowed with knowledge among you? Let him show it out of good conduct his works with meekness of wisdom. But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth (Jas: 3, 13-14). Have you noticed that truth in the word of God and in the writings of the Holy Fathers, well-expressed or not, is always valued by whether it is helpful or harmful for the salvation of the soul? Truth is valued not by theoretical or logical considerations, but by moral considerations. So here too the Holy Apostle gives us the chance to think and speak, that even the task of theology is not yet serving God alone: it is possible even to be a theologian and still worship other gods, to serve soulless idols. The lack of devotion to God alone, together with the wish to combine the worship of God and idols, has today, especially among Western heretics, created a view of theology as a mere outward knowledge. What is theology? For many it is merely a knowledge of theological truths, but the ignorance of God. The knowledge of God is the knowledge that comes from experience. Only the pure in heart shall see God and therefore true theology must be piety and only then will it bring forth fruit according to its kind. Theology without piety is one of the pale and sickly offspring of our idolatrous age, which refuses to worship the one God. The theologians who have the Spirit did not and do not know such a theology. St Isaac the Syrian likens such theologizing to prostitutes who speak of chastity and considers it as of little use as someone who would set fire to wet firewood. And those few people who sincerely seek God, who yearn for Him with their souls, who ask theologians for heavenly truth are repelled by such theology and say: 'We are perishing from spiritual hunger, – why do you give us stones instead of bread?' And how ephemeral are all the works of this soulless theology! They are stale like barley bread (Judg 5: 8) and no-one wants to know them.

The writings of theologians who have the Spirit live for thousands of years; good people read them with love and save their souls through them. A living and real theology must be our calling too, one

which is piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit (Heb 4:12), a saving theology. Such a theology cannot be tedious, lifeless, without content, because it is the highest manifestation of life, the inner cultivation of the Christian soul, until Christ is formed in it (Gal 4:19).

For our good fortune here we have the best aid to do such theology. Here is our Russian shrine, where for centuries, like a clear candle flame, faithful souls have burned with the fire of sacred inspiration and been warmed by the warmth of heartfelt tenderness. Just look at our beloved Academy from outside! Much can be found here for the edification of the soul, which is dedicated to the love of wisdom. Have you noticed that the house of God stands at the centre of its buildings? And do all these buildings not remind you of those by the temple in Jerusalem, where the heavenly patroness of our church was raised, she who now stretches out her precious stole over the whole Academy? And does all this not tell us the absolute truth that authentic Orthodox Christian theology must be as close to and as inseparable as possible from Church life? May the Queen of Heaven, who Herself was raised in the Temple, help us too to be raised in the Lord (see the stichira of the Feast of the Presentation) in the church which is dedicated to her!

Although it is time to bring our words to the haven of silence, how can we not look to the future? I am the Lord thy God, thou shalt have no other gods before me! After this is it still possible to go to a far land, to worship other gods, to serve other gods, to sacrifice our lives for other gods? To abandon God and Holy Church at a time when there is such a great need for workers in Christ's harvest fields!

Waterless clouds have gathered over the Russian plains from all sides. They have been brought by the wind, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever (Jude 1:13). Their mouths utter words that are puffed up. These are murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts (Jude 1:16). The cunning adversary walks about in the form of wild people, like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour (I Pet 5:8). The gates of hell have gathered all their might and have fallen headlong on Christ's Holy Church. Do we have to point out these enemies of the Church? But who does not know them? Only the blind cannot see them. We believe, we believe unwaveringly, that no winds, no tempests can sink the ship of Jesus Christ! The gates of hell shall not prevail against the Church of Christ! Truth is great and stronger than all things, it endures and is strong for ever (2 Esd 4:35-38). It is easier to extinguish the sun than to destroy the Church, as St John Chrysostom says. Let us not fear for Holy Church! But look how the inheritance of God is stolen away! How many good people have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Chor (Jude 1: 1. Compare Gen 4:7; Num 22:22; 16:13). Surely it is not possible to entangle ourselves with the affairs of this life (2 Tim 2:4) with a clear conscience, when they are tormenting our own mother – Holy Church – and her children are being stolen away? In the form of the Church Christ is once more being crucified, once more being mocked and reviled in madness. What sort of conscience do we need not to lighten the cross of Christ, like Simon of Cyrene? How can any who have received a Church education, to whom God has given strength and knowledge, who love God, whom Christ has chosen for His service, not stand up and defend the Savior? How can they not guard the inheritance of God from plundering wolves? This is a great and gracious cause. If any of you, writes the Apostle, do err from the truth, and one convert him, let him know that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins (Jas 5: 19-20). And how sad it is when you hear that they who have started all with one consent begin to make excuse (Lk 14:18). Around us are brothers who perish for the faith and the guests say: This is not my affair: let those who wish serve him, but as for me...I have bought a piece of ground, I have married a wife, – have me excused (Lk 14: 18-20). But the blood of your brother, the blood of all who through your negligence have been trapped by the spiritual wolf, cries to God from the ground (Gen 4:10). To you is given strength, to you knowledge, and you did not want to give them to the service of God and Holy Church? Thou didst eat fine flour and honey and oil, but thou didst shamelessly betray God (Ezek 16:13; read to the end of the chapter).

Are we to speak of weakness, of unworthiness? Yes we know that Moses wanted to give up (Ex

3:11 – 4:17), that Jonah fled to Tarshish, that the Gregories and the Chrysostoms were afraid, that through humility St Sergius wanted to give up. But you, who so zealously cling on to your petty vanity at other times, are you sincerely speaking of your unworthiness? Would you not rather wish to give up in favor of a carefree life, on the pretext of humility, as St John Chrysostom says, are your words of humility not merely an excuse with which you hope to calm both yourself and others? Are your words of humility not simply a way of making yourself a comfortable bed, where you can rest your slumbering soul in untroubled sleep? Does your hypocritical cowardice not conceal your stony-hearted indifference to Christ and His cause? Do you run away from the judgment of the Church simply because you love the praise of men more than the praise of God? (Jn 12:43). Just for one moment be sincere with yourself and answer all these questions for yourself, my brother, fearlessly, boldly and truthfully.

It is not right to rely only on yourself, but commit all your strength, abilities, knowledge which the Lord has blessed you with, into God's hands, like the widow who gave her mite, and say with the Apostle: I can do all things through Christ, which strengtheneth me! (Phil 4:13). It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth (Lam 3:27). Here on earth, in the Church militant, he endures hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ (2 Tim 2:3), but the Lord God shall crown him with a crown of victory in the Church. He will triumph in the heavens, where a crown of righteousness is laid up unto all them that love Christ (2 Tim 4:8).

To consider as nothing all the empty and soulless idols of this vain world, to consider them all as rubbish and to serve God alone and His Holy Church – nothing is and can be nothing higher than this! But those who for the sake of earthly idols give up what Christ allots them should know that the dreary, empty and ugly songs of the world can never replace what are for the souls that love God the sweetest sounds of heaven, and that you will not find any consolation for your soul at the crossroads of this world, at the crooked and depraved paths of idolatry (Judg 5:6).

I am the Lord thy God, and thou shalt have no other gods before me! Harken, O soul that loves God, to the voice of God! If you do not heed it, ye shall be devoured with the sword; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it (Is 1:20). To love the Lord your God alone, to listen to His voice, to cleave unto Him with all your heart – this is your life and the length of your days! Life and death are set before you, O soul that loves God, blessing and cursing. Choose life and not death! (Deut 30:19-20).

*Translated from Russian by Fr. Andrew Phillips and Alexey Malafeev*

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