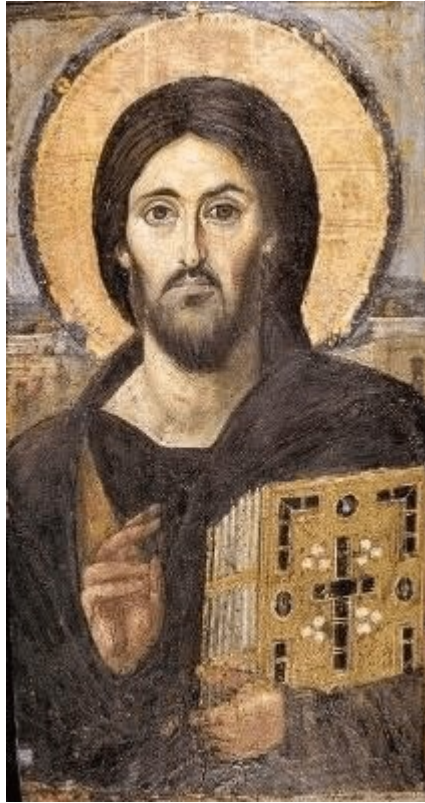


While There Is Time

*By bishop Avgoustinos of Florina, from the weekly bulletin ““Kiriaki,”” Feb. 6, 2005
[translated from Greek by the staff of the Greek Orthodox Brotherhood of St. Poimen]*



““In an acceptable time I have heard thee.....”” [Isaiah 49:8, 2 Cor 6:2]

I ask, dear friends, that you pay close attention to these words. We will spend some time in interpreting them; they are a prophecy by Isaiah and those of you who will comprehend them will become the ““lottery”’s grand prize winners.”” Otherwise I am left with no alternative and I wash my hands.....

What is the meaning of these words? I will start my interpretation from a little further away.

When a person intends to travel internationally, he prepares his passport and arranges for a visa from the intended destination country’s embassy accordingly. Generally speaking, all travelers inquire about the departure time of the bus, train, ship or airplane and make every reasonable effort to ensure that they are on time, with their ticket in hand. Similarly, a young man who plans to study at a university ensures that he prepares and submits the necessary application forms, as required by the educational institution of his choice. It is likewise for the businessman who has borrowed funds for his business and is obliged to submit monthly payments; he makes every effort to be on time and to not cause any issues with his lender. What I am trying to say is that as we always make the necessary time to ensure that we obtain our passport, purchase our ticket, pay our loan, and attend to all of our other duties related to employment, marriage and family, similarly there is adequate time for a different obligation, more important than any which life

presents us.

What is this obligation? Well, God did not create us for travel and business, for degrees and titles, for dowries and weddings. These things have nothing to do with our main purpose. What is our true purpose? The above verse says it clearly. As there is always time for all worldly matters, there is likewise plenty of time for this most important matter. However, which one of us truly understands this? One may say that it is necessary for an angel to descend from Heaven and inject within our heart some of the faith and love that our saints possess; only then might it be possible for us to truly feel and comprehend the Apostle's words.

““In an acceptable time I have heard Thee.”” In other words the time which we spend in this world is truly priceless; it is time for the purpose of salvation. Our life may last 20, 40, 60 or 80 years; what can we do during this time? Why do we ask? Why do we not open the holy scriptures, the synaxarion, or even visit a cemetery, where the bodies of many lie buried? Why do we not look in the stars in the sky and then, searching within our heart, ask ourselves: ““Why did we come to this world?”” What is it that we ought to accomplish within the span of our earthly life? Well, I am about to tell you, just make sure you are paying attention:

You my young lady, that spends so much time in front of the mirror or stay up during all hours of the night entertaining yourself, draw near and listen to me. And you, my young man, who spends your day running around in your car or motorcycle, draw near and listen to me as well. And you, my dear housewife, who spends hours window shopping in the malls, come near me as well. All of you, why are you wasting so much of your time? I do not ask for much; I only ask that you set aside some of your time each day for prayer, to kneel and speak with God.

I am also talking to you, the husband, who spends hours upon hours studying those papers with the fine print. I see you on the train or bus or at home either in front of the TV or staring at magazines and newspapers. What is it that you find in them? Please forgive my language, but have you ever seen a man use a stick to dig up or disturb cow droppings? Not really, because such an act would bring forth offensive odors and stench. Draw near my fellow Christian and if you are a baptized Orthodox man, then open up your Bible each day and spend some time reading it with your wife and children so that all of your eyes may open.

What else? Take a pen and paper and start counting the hours. One entire week comprised of 168 hours. From all these hours, what does God ask of you? Simply just one or two hours to attend the weekly Sunday Liturgy; to be in church from the moment you hear ““Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit”” all the way to ““Through the prayers of the Holy Fathers, Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on us and save us, Amen.”” If the priest asks us to attend an all-night vigil, who goes? If, however, the devil calls us to join him in the dark entertainment centers of the evening, then many run to be with him through midnight and beyond. While in church, though, they all ask ““How much longer until it's over?””

In the end my fellow Christians, every new year God grants you a new cycle of 365 days. Every year is like a long komboloi (worry beads) with 365 beads. Every day is represented by a golden bead. Yes, my fellow Orthodox Christian, it is truly made of gold since we all know too well that ““time is money.”” From all these 365 days dedicate at least one day and approach the spiritual clinic through the sacrament of Holy Confession. When you lose your physical health, I see you

running to doctors and hospitals. For your soul, however, do you do anything? Thus my child, from all these 365 days, pick a day or two and seek a confessor, go and kneel in front of him and confess your offenses.

So you see my child, it is unfortunate but true. There is such great unwillingness to dedicate five minutes for prayer, a few minutes to study the Holy Bible, an hour or two to attend the weekly Liturgy, a day or two for confession. What can we then expect from God?

My brethren, as you can see, I have taken a hold of the valuable coin on which is inscribed ““In an acceptable time I have heard Thee.....”” and I peeled it apart so all of us can comprehend these words. Now that this deed is completed, which one of you will take the time to establish his or her timetable and itinerary. Which one of you will rise in the morning and instead of standing in front of the bathroom mirror will take the time to seek the spiritual mirror contained within our Holy Bible and read it? Which one of you will kneel at home to pray? Which one of you will make it a point to start coming to church every Sunday? Which one of you will make it a point to seek and find a spiritual father for confession?

It is within the time afforded to us by God in this life of ours that these deeds must be completed. You must also take note that time is of the essence, even though it appears that we have plenty of time. Our church reminds us of this every day: ““That we complete the remaining time of our lives in peace and repentance, let us ask of the Lord.”” What is the duration of our life going to be? How much longer will we live? Is it perhaps possible that this current year is the last one of our earthly life? What am I saying? Could this current month be our last one? Perhaps even this next week or next day may end up being our last one..... Do you doubt me? Well, just open the newspaper and read the obituary section.....

There was a mayor of Athens once who organized a large party to celebrate his birthday, inviting politicians, ministers and many others. They all gathered in happiness. The table was set with the finest foods; flowers were everywhere; the music was playing. In his pocket he even had the papers ready with the speech he would deliver. He was standing by the door having his picture taken as he greeted each of his guests. But before he made it to the table, his call arrived. He could have never expected it to come at that time, but it did come, as lightening from a clear sky! What type of lightening? A heart attack..... He fell down, never to get up again; they lifted him and carried him away with their hands..... He was truly gone. As far as his guests, none of them sat around to enjoy the meal. They were all beside themselves. Those of you who were raised in small villages may have seen the following: several chickens grazing in the meadow when suddenly a hawk appears out of nowhere and plunges among them, snatches one of them and quickly disappears. The remaining chickens become greatly agitated. This is exactly, my brethren, how death appears — like a hawk that snatches lives away. He snatches you in the store, in the street, in the town square, during a wedding, during a baptism, during elections, wherever he finds you! He snatches the elderly as well as babies from their cribs.

My brethren, how much longer shall we remain senseless? How much longer shall we refuse to consider eternity?

““In an acceptable time, I have heard thee.....”” In a very old book, I read that there was a king a long time ago who had the following custom. Throughout his entire kingdom and whenever he

came near a city with his army, he carried two flags; a white one and a black one. When he approached the city, he raised the white flag which meant that as long as that flag was raised, a soldier did not have permission to disturb anything, not even the hair on a person's head! All of the city's inhabitants had also the ability to request favors from the king, whatever they desired. This, however, was for a short duration only and it had a very definitive time limit. As soon as time was up, the black flag was raised and then mothers would weep for their children; in homes and in fields, to people and to animals alike, fire, murder, blood everywhere.....

Do you comprehend what I am telling you? Christ, our good King, raises His white flag over this world through His Holy Cross. Let all the sinful come, all people, all nations, while there is time (““In an acceptable time.....””)! The time will soon come that the white flag of love and mercy will be lowered and then all gates will be shut. The day will come that you will arrive only to find the Church door closed. You will keep knocking but not even the chanter will be there to answer. The stars and the sun will be extinguished and the rivers will dry up. The moment of judgment and justice will be upon us all!

My brethren, as long as we remain in this vain world, let us repent, let us weep, and let us all beg for God's mercy. May God deem us worthy to spend the rest of our life ““in peace and repentance,”” through the intercessions of our Holy Theotokos and all the saints. Amen.