



*Are you prepared to hear
if God speaks to you?*

Saint Paul the Apostle Orthodox Church

24 BURKE ROAD

FREEHOLD, NJ 07728

Seventh Sunday After Pentecost

July 27, 2014

**Father Robert E Lucas, Pastor;
Subdeacon Daniel J. Korba and Nikitas Tsokris,
Cantors**

Rectory 215-862-9227; Parish Center 732-780-3158

We Are A Stewardship Parish Of Time, Talent and Treasure

The mission of our parish faith community is to teach the Gospel message in the rich tradition of the Orthodox Church; to enable people to reflect the image of Jesus Christ in every day activities of life; to offer spiritual formation through changing times; and to celebrate community among Orthodox believers in our Freehold area.

We of St. Paul the Apostle Parish dedicate ourselves to maintaining the sanctity of worship and spiritual enlightenment in a family environment that reaches and involves all ages and unifies all people.

We believe in the spirit of ecumenism in which we share our faith by word and example and extend our spiritual insights to all people.

We accept the responsibility of Christian Stewardship that through generous giving we may all experience a faith communion with Christ as the Center of our lives.

We dedicate ourselves to insuring the well-being of all people so that we may truly experience the message of Christ's salutary gospel.

We are a beacon on a hill with the eyes of many upon us; that beacon is the inspired Light of Christ which must shine brightly in our lives.

It is not ourselves we preach but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts, that we in turn might make known the glory of God shining on the face of Christ. This treasure we possess in earthen vessels to make it clear that its surpassing power comes from God and not from us. We are afflicted in every way possible, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in us 2 Corinthians 4: 5 – 8.

GLAD TIDINGS

+++ Every Monday, we have prayerful devotions before the Myrrh bearing icon at 6:00 PM. Everyone is invited to be present in praise. The Birthgiver invites us to manifest our faith in response to her first shown love, to unite our prayers with hers for the salvation of our souls. Invite your friends and neighbors to join us.

+++ **TODAY is the simple feast of St. Pontelemon the Healer/Martyr. Our celebration is concluded with festal anointing. With the healing oil from the monastery of St. Saba in Jeruslaem. The customary greeting is "Christ Is Among Us!" to which we respond, "He Is And Shall Be!"**

+++ **Please keep the intentions of these members of our parish intercession community in your daily prayers: Father George, Anna, Barbara, Betty, James, Yevlogia, Maria, Pani Anna Marie and Andrea.**

+++ **The sign-up sheet for both the Web Site and Bulletin sponsors is on the bulletin board in the kitchen. Please sign up as soon as possible. Do NOT make payment until your sign-up month has arrived. This will make it easier for Father to keep track of payments. Thanks in advance to all who support the parish in this way.**

+++ **We offer thanks to the Blessed Trinity for inspiring generosity in the souls of our faithful and the blessing of abundant grace in our midst with the offering received last Sunday: Tithe Offering, \$423.00; Candles, \$16.00; Holy Day, \$50.00; July Website, \$25.00, for a total of \$511.00. We express our profound gratitude to the parishioner communicants who offer their God-given treasure and labored for the sake of the Lord and the good of our parish. God bless and reward you good and faithful souls!**

+++ **This Friday the Dormition Fast begins until Friday, August 15. Please observe the prescriptions of the fast that our souls are sanctified and our parish be the beneficiary of our sacrifices for growth in holiness and grace. On Monday, August 4 we will have the Akathist to the Saviour and on Monday, August 11, the Akathist to the Birthgiver will be celebrated in anticipation.**

+++ **As faithful believers, we intercede and associate ourselves in prayer with the following who have prayed and offered seven day lights for their intentions: Father Lucas, Delores Waller, Maria Idronmenos, Anna Zacharyczuk, Eleanor Korba, Marilyn Korba and Pani Buletza.**

+++ **We make a PENNIES FROM HEAVEN Canister available for our faithful to bring in pennies for our altar and its appointments. We are already in receipt of \$1809.00 from this apostolate. Even your pennies can help and are a blessing to our parish.**

+++ **Please be certain to see a member of the Parish Council if you would like to help our parish by using Shop Rite Food Coupons available in \$20.00 denominations. We invite ALL to be caring and supportive and use Grocery Coupons for food shopping as we have gratefully realized \$5750 on this project to date!**

+++ **The Clothing Drive is a permanent on-going project in our parish. Please bring any type of clothing and fabrics along with stuffed animals and shoes for the benefit of our parish. The bags can be left in the vestibule or on the front porch of the rectory. Please invite your friends and neighbors to assist us in disposing of unwanted clothing, shoes and fabrics.**

+++ **We invite all pray the Lord our God grants us an enrichment of our spiritual lives for his glory.**

+++ **Work is about to begin on the exterior of our building with the soffit being replaced completely so that new gutters and down spouts may be installed. Plans are being made to have the dome refurbished and reinstalled on the roof.**



The Grace of God

He saved us; not because of any righteous deeds we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the baptism of new birth and renewal by the Holy Spirit Titus 3:5.

I repeat, it is owing to his favor that salvation is yours through faith. This is not your own doing; it is God's gift Ephesians 2:8.

God has saved us and has called us to a holy life, not because of an merit of ours, but according to his own design, the grace held out to us in Christ Jesus before the world began 2 Timothy 1:9.

For a sun and a shield is the Lord God; grace and glory he bestows; the Lord withholds no good thing from those who walk in sincerity Psalm 84:12.

So let us confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and favor and to find help in time of need Hebrews 4:16.

I will give them a heart with which to understand that I am the Lord. They shall be my people and I will be their God, for they shall return to me with their whole heart Jeremiah 24:7.

I will give them a new heart and put a new spirit within them; I will remove the stony heart from their bodies, and replace it with a natural heart, so that they will live according to my statutes and observe and carry out my ordinances; thus they shall be my people and I will be their God Ezekiel 11: 19, 20.

Sin will no longer have power over you; you are now under grace, not under the law Romans 6:14.

All men are now undeservedly justified by the gift of God, through the redemption wrought in Christ Jesus. Through his blood, God made him the means of expiation for all who believe. He did so to manifest his own justice, for the sake of remitting sins committed in the past Romans 3:24, 25.

Our belief is rather that we are saved by the favor of the Lord Jesus and so are they Acts of the Apostles 15:11.

I BELIEVE IN THE REMISSION OF SINS

O Most Holy Trinity, have mercy on us;

O Lord, cleanse us of our sins;

O Master forgive our transgressions:

O Holy One, come to us and heal our infirmities for Your Name's sake.

Orthodox Prayer to the Holy Trinity

There are many times in our battle with sin that our behavior falls particularly short of the bare-minimum expectations. Many of us have grim memories of our offensiveness in the sight of God. One man tells the story of how he and a friend were involved in finishing painting a severely dilapidated commercial building. Short of a total remodeling job, there was no earthly way the rickety structure with its dry-rot and peeling paint could ever have been made to look good, but they tried exceptionally hard and did their best. Then the owner came around to inspect the progress. His expectations disappointed, he commenced to complain at great length about the work done. Not only did he not appreciate their extra effort, he demanded extra work that was totally unreasonable and far beyond the terms of the original contract. Both listened patiently to his fault-finding for some time, steadily building up internal steam. Then came the explosion. One of the exasperated painters berated him in every unseemly manner. He could be heard for blocks around. Totally out of control, he gave vent to his passion of anger.

The outburst occurred about 11:00 a.m. and then he spent the hour before lunch nursing that familiar, empty, sick feeling you get in the pit of the stomach when you know you have really done something wrong. No one needed to inform him he sinned. His very nature told him. He was feeling it. And it was academic whether the owner was right or wrong; the painter completely lost his temper. He was wrong. He offended both God and man. And himself as well.

The other painter during the luncheon break tried to console the down-hearted one knowing he was dejected and discouraged. The overwhelming sense of self-condemnation after such an outburst can be devastating. We feel defeated. We begin to question our fundamental vocation: "So you're a follower of Christ?" "You want to know the Lord and have a personal relationship with Him?" "Get serious! There's no way someone who does the things you do could really be much of a Christian." These are the kinds of haunting and devastating thoughts that enter the mind.

Though defeated, guilty, and discouraged, you do not give up on faith commitment to Christ in such circumstances. But you certainly do not want a repeat performance. So how do you proceed? You turn to our God for forgiveness, and then seek His grace to overcome. If we are to follow after the Lord, forgiveness must be an integral part of our pilgrimage to holiness. We must discover what our God has done in Christ to remove our sins from us "*as far as the east is from the west*" Psalm 103:12, as the Scriptures teach us. An understanding of forgiveness is worth all the effort necessary to grasp it, for without that understanding there is no possibility of progress in our capacity to resist sin successfully.

Forgiven, Not Excused

The painter knew and recognized his blow-up was a sin against the owner of the building, against his partner who was present, an offense in the sight of God and against his own immortal soul as well as all those who were offended by the language and example for blocks around. Of course, the painter began making excuses. He began talking about the owner being a jerk and the entire stream of thought that follows such "logic." But excuses for sinning cannot do in the sight of God. We may have a thousand and one plausible explanations for our sinful acts, but none of them has an effect in remitting even one of our sins or changing our conduct the least bit. In fact, when we look for excuses, we sin even more because we are indulging our pride even further.

Certainly, we must know our God does not excuse our sins either. He forgives them. Indeed, in Christ, He has done all that is necessary for our forgiveness. But there are some things we must now do in order to receive that forgiveness. It is not automatic. It does not just happen. Four concrete actions are necessary if we are to know and experience God's forgiveness of our sins: *repentance, confession, faith, and obedience*. God supplies the grace for us to perform successfully all these, but we must willingly choose to avail ourselves of that grace and respond with the godly action He calls for.

Repentance

For many, repentance may need to begin with a change in attitude toward sinning. If you believe it is inevitable you commit certain sins, and that you're "dead in the water" by default as soon as a specific temptation arises, you need to change your thinking about all that. It is possible you were even taught that it is just natural to sin. That is not at all true. Sin is not natural. It is not only against God, it is against our nature as it was created in the beginning. The Scriptures which enjoin us over and over not to sin, assume sin is unnatural. In calling us to repentance, Christ is calling us back to our natural state, the way we were before Adam and Eve introduced sin into the world.

Believing certain sins are inevitable virtually rules out true repentance from those sins. How can we be genuinely repentant for doing what we cannot help doing? Besides, what good would it do to repent if you are going to do it again the next time that same temptation confronts you?

Having come to a new and realistic orientation about the inevitability of certain sins, it is next needed to set our hearts not to sin. The assumption that we are destined to commit at least certain particularly besetting sins is often accompanied by the corollary supposition, "Well, God forgives. I won't even try to resist this temptation." That kind of presumption hardens the heart and suppresses faith. Presumption on God's future mercy is also a sin. Self-deceit builds upon self-deceit.

The matter of the heart-set becomes all the more important when we realize sin has consequences in our lives, and usually in the lives of others. Sin is not merely the violation of a law, for example, going fifty

miles-per-hour in a thirty-mile-per-hour zone. In that situation, assuming you are caught, you pay an appropriate monetary fine and it is all over. End of the consequences. If you do not get a ticket, there may be no consequence at all for your infraction. But that is not at all the way it is with sin.

In terms of consequences, God's moral and spiritual law is similar to His natural law, such as the law of gravity. Jump off a twenty-story building and you get smashed when you hit bottom. You do not avoid the consequences simply because there is no cosmic cop to see you attempting the jump who gives you a ticket for trespassing in space, or attempting to litter the sidewalk. The results are disastrously far worse. You are caught by the consequences every time because you do hit bottom. No exceptions. It is the law of gravity. And that is how it is with sin. It is deadly.

The commandment, *"You shall not commit adultery"* Exodus 20:14, is a perfect example. It is not an arbitrary prohibition dreamed up by the Holy Trinity to prevent humans from having fun. Adultery has serious consequences - always! - just as surely as jumping from a twenty-story building. Adultery will always adversely affect the offender's relationship with God profoundly. It will adversely affect you personally. It cripples marriages and traumatizes children, including those not yet born. It does damage to the society in which we live. Adultery is a violation of human nature, and it is because of its grave consequences God said, *"Do not do it!"* Adultery is sex without genuine love. That is contrary to human nature as God created it. Both because of the sin itself and its repercussions we need to set our hearts not to sin.

Having rejected the inevitability of sin, and set our hearts not to sin, we then need to repent anytime we sin, and as often as we sin. Repentance is the first message of the gospel. Our Lord began His public ministry with *"Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand"* Matthew 4: 17. Apart from repentance, there is no forgiveness of sins.

These are the values that are involved in sincere repentance: We must agree with our God that what we did was sin. We do not argue with God over the content of sin. Besides, the only thing that God forgives is sin, so the sooner we agree with Him about what we have done, the sooner we are able to receive His forgiveness. Our agreement with God must be accompanied by godly sorrow for committing the sin. *"Indeed, sorrow for God's sake produces a repentance without regrets, leading to salvation, whereas worldly sorrow brings death. Just look at the fruit of this sorrow which stems from God. What a measure of holy zeal it has brought you, not to speak of readiness to defend yourselves! What indignation, fear, and longing! What ardent desire to restore the balance of justice! In every way you have displayed your innocence in this matter"* 2 Corinthians 7: 10, 11. Godly sorrow penetrates to the very depth of the human heart and soul. It is sorrow for the offense to God and heart-felt grief over the consequences in both the life of the one who committed the sin and those whom the sin affects. It is sorrow for falling short of the mark God has set, for failing to do God's will. This is the sorrow that leads to repentance and works repentance in us. One of the great illustrations of godly sorrow for sin is the Apostle Peter after his three-fold denial of the Lord. The Scriptures report that afterwards, *"Peter went out and wept bitterly"* Luke 22: 62.

We must turn away from our sin, seeking God's grace not to do it again. You resolve you are going to be different, to live differently, no matter how difficult the task, no matter how many times you have got to get up and begin again after a fall into sin. This change cannot be accomplished without the power of God working in you. But change will not take place without your will being totally set to make the change. You have to very seriously want it for your own spiritual well-being and God's glory.

Finally, repentance is not a one time affair. That is not even a realistic possibility. Repentance is always a life-long practice. It may begin in a moment, and we may truly turn to God in that moment. What needs to happen in that moment is to begin a process in which a purification of the mind and struggle against sinful thoughts progresses. True repentance is a rooting out of sin, and that is not completed in the spontaneity of a moment. Only in relatively recent years has the spiritually suicidal heresy that repentance is a one time event in our lives become widely held in some so-called Christian circles. Spiritual growth stops with the cessation of repentance, and spiritual lethargy sets in. Spiritual death inevitably follows. How often do we need to repent? As often as we sin! Jesus said, "*Repent and believe in the gospel*" Mark 1: 15. Repentance is no more a one time event, never to be repeated, than is belief. When we cease believing, we must return again to belief; and when we sin again, we must return again to virtue; we must repent once more.

In summary, repentance is a change of mind and soul about sin. It is being sincerely sorry for falling short of the mark God set for those whom He loves. It is turning from that sin with all your heart and soul. And it is not a one time, but a lifetime of effort. You cannot achieve repentance on your own strength, but only by the empowering grace of God you can be sorrowful, if you will. It is the very first condition for forgiveness.

Confession

The second action leading to forgiveness is confession of sin. Confession is not an option for anyone who desires to be forgiven. To confess your sins means to acknowledge them to God. You actually name them and accuse yourself of them.

Confession of sin is necessarily practiced from two perspectives. The first is confession made directly to our Lord. Daily in our prayers, we should confess to God the sins we are aware of and ask Him to bring to mind those we are not aware of. Confession of this kind should be a well-formed habit in our lives as believers. We can call it an examination of conscience, but it ought to be practiced daily. The Fiftieth Psalm is a powerful aid in confession of this kind.

The second perspective of sin is the confession of sin which believers call the sacramental Mystery of Reconciliation. This Mystery requires confession to God in the presence of His priest. All Christians need this dimension of repentance. It is equally important to experience freedom from the guilt of more serious sins and to bring sin to its conclusion, to terminate sin's damaging consequences, and to break the tyranny of a passion, a besetting sin. The power of some sins will never be broken without the grace of this sacramental Mystery.

Regrettably, there are those who say, "I confess only to God Himself." Many so convinced are totally sincere, but are unfortunately trapped by the harsh realities of history, particularly history since the Protestant Reformation which introduced a deadly ambivalence and confusion over this issue of confession of sins. Since we live in a western Protestant nation, it is difficult to remain aloof from this mentality because it is all pervasive and ruinous to souls and detours their salvation. Some otherwise serious believers have succumbed to its convoluted logic.

Confession was practiced in Apostolic times because the followers of Christ introduced it into the life of the Church at His command. It is the very first fruit of the Resurrection of our Lord. *"Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive men's sins, they are forgiven them; if you hold them bound, they are held bound"* John 20: 23. That it was an integral part of Church life is evident and plain enough. *"Declare your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may find healing"* James 5: 16; *"Many who had become believers came forward and openly confessed their former practices"* Acts of the Apostles 19: 18; *"But if we acknowledge our sins, he who is just can be trusted to forgive our sins and cleanse us from every wrong. If we say, 'we have never sinned,' we make him a liar and his word finds no place in us"* 1 John 1: 9. This soul-saving practice has continued unabated and uninterrupted ever since in the life of His Body, our blessed Church.

Yes, there are some who think confession of sin is a joke or even an evil thing, perhaps invented by the devil. How many ridicule pious believers in Christ going to confession and receiving the forgiveness of God. But these are only emotionally charged people who do not understand the mystery of salvation because of some grave abuses anchored at the time of the Reformation when the baby was thrown out with the bath water. So these people are spiritually impoverished and deprived because the abuse of something good and proper is rarely a reason for rejecting it. Many reject the necessity of confession of sins because of past abuses and bad experiences. Yes, there were abuses and many have negative experiences, but we have yet to hear anyone calling for an abstinence from sexual activity because there are many serious abuses of it on every level all around us, as the media attests. Logic gets distorted when mingled with bad emotions. Wisdom, on the other hand, must prevent us from allowing somebody else's bad history to lead us to watered down non-Scriptural theology.

Confessing our sins in the presence of a godly priest is also manifestly sound psychology. In fact, the case can be made that modern psychologists and psychiatrists have replaced parish priests simply because Catholics utilize them in many ways the confessional is designed to be used by our God, and so neglect the sacramental Mystery. It is God Who has made us in such a way that confession of sin is solid mental health, as well as profoundly solid spiritual health. Confession in this context is the foundation of effective pastoral counseling and cannot be separated from it. The therapist may make us feel better, but he cannot offer us God's forgiveness.

Unfortunately for those who reject confession in the presence of a priest, there are many sins which never are brought to light in any other way. The pattern or cycle of sin goes on unbroken. Some who refuse confession in the presence of a priest, insisting they privately confess their sins to God, actually

coddle serious sins with no intention of changing their way in regard to sin. And some, after true repentance has taken place, never completely resolve their feelings of guilt. They do not hear the words of absolution fall from the lips of the confessor at the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

Others develop a false pride, which incidentally has its source not in God, but in the tempter to sin, and become ashamed to confess their sins. It might well be asked, how can I in sincerity confess before Almighty God, if I cannot admit these sins before another sinner like myself?

It is not the priest who forgives sins, it is our good and gracious God, but the forgiveness and absolution are offered only through the priest. A very ancient prayer of the priestly confessor in the presence of the penitent goes like this: *"My spiritual child, who has confessed your sins before my humble person, who am also a humble sinner remind you it is God alone Who forgives sin, but through that divinely spoken word which came to the Apostles after the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, saying, ' Whose sins you forgive they are forgiven and whose sins you retain, they are retained'; with boldness I dare to say whatever you have confessed in my humble presence and whatever you failed to confess through ignorance or forgetfulness, whatever it may be, may God forgive you in this present world and in that which is to come"* Ancient Byzantine Prayers.

And God does forgive, of that we can be certain if we have the proper spiritual disposition. The priestly confessor's final admonition usually is: "Go in peace and sin no more!" Now that's assurance; that's the fruit of good confession of sins!

One of the most neglected aspects of confession is the possibility of developing a spiritual relationship with a priest as spiritual guide and spiritual Father which is essentially necessary for genuine spiritual development and advancement. There is a degree of arrogance obviated in attempting to progress spiritually on our own. Scripture provides no example of this kind of so-called spiritual life except perhaps that of St. John the Baptist, and perhaps St. Paul. But they assuredly are exceptions. Confession before a priest may be the beginning of this vital for the soul relationship.

Believers labor, trying their best to conquer a besetting sin, but they fail because they lack God's provision for repentance and confession. Confession for believers is the preamble to forgiveness. We need both the daily examination of conscience and the regular habit of confession to our God in the sacramental Mystery of Reconciliation. And we must do it God's way, not our own.

Faith

Faith is an absolute prerequisite for forgiveness. Repentance and confession, if they are to bear the fruit of forgiveness, must be accompanied by faith. Faith is far more than mere mental assent to a body of religious information. Faith is dynamic, the living action of the soul trusting fully in God. And faith must be a current reality, not the memory of an experience in the past. Therefore, we must answer fundamental questions about faith: What is the *source* of faith? What is the *content* of faith?

Faith calls on us to rely wholly, totally and completely upon what God has revealed to the eyes of our heart and soul. But though you must do the believing, you are in no way the source of your faith because Christ alone is. He offers the grace to believe, for faith is a gift of God. *"I repeat, it is owing to his favor, that salvation is yours through faith. This is not your own doing, it is God's gift; neither is it a reward for anything you have accomplished, so let no one pride himself on it"* Ephesians 2: 8, 9. Then, in response, you receive the gift to believe. There is a necessary working together with Christ in this. In a very real sense your faith is His faith. St. Paul testified to the Galatian Christians, *"The life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me"* Galatians 2:20. "Faith in the Son of God" can be easily translated "the faith of the Son of God." The faith is Christ's. He willingly offers it and imparts it. The believer willingly receives it, exercises it and lives it.

God-given faith has body; it has content. Faith as a vague concept, as in, "it is important for me to believe in something greater than myself" is entirely useless, even condemnatory pagan. Honest to goodness faith believes what is right and true. To begin with, it believes what God Himself has done for us in the Incarnation, death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Three important aspects of what God has done in Christ need to be assimilated into the content of faith.

Jesus Christ is our sacrifice for sin. Christ's sacrificial death on the Cross is the only basis acceptable to God for the forgiveness of our sins. Jesus is that sacrifice because He is God in the flesh. From His own mouth came the words, *"Sacrifice and offering you do not desire, but a body you have prepared for me"* Hebrews 10: 5. And in that very same letter that declaration is followed by *"By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all"* Hebrews 10:10.

Jesus Christ bore our sins on the Cross. He knew no sin, but became sin for us. *"For our sakes God made him who did not know sin, to be sin, so that in him we might become the very holiness of God"* 2 Corinthians 5:21. He took all our sins upon Himself. On the Cross, the Father in heaven *"laid upon Him the iniquity of us all"* Isaiah 53:6. *"He himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree"* 1 Peter 2:24, and thus He is the very foundation for the forgiveness of sins.

Jesus Christ alone gains our forgiveness. The death of Jesus Christ on the Cross counts with the Holy Trinity for us all. It was *His* death alone, no one else's, that could result in forgiveness for all. All others have themselves been subject to death and under its authority. Jesus alone was above the pervasive power of death. His Virgin birth is of utmost consequence here, for because of this, even in His humanity He was not subject to death's power, and He alone was born of a Virgin. Jesus did die, but He submitted to death of His own free will, not because He had to. He consented to it for the sake of our salvation.

Abraham, Sarah, David, Elisha, Daniel, Zachariah, Elizabeth, and John the Baptist were among the finest people who have ever lived. But great as they were, their deaths could not qualify as a sacrifice for sin, not even for themselves. The deaths of these people, or the death of anyone other than Jesus Christ could do nothing to atone for the sin and guilt of humanity. That is a task only God could accomplish.

It takes God to die as a sacrifice for human sin, but divine nature itself cannot die. Therefore, it was necessary that God become man in order to die. As one great theologian of the early Church said, "We needed an incarnate God; God put to death, that we might live." In the mystery of the Incarnation, the Son of God became a man, assuming human nature, so He could die for the sins of the whole world. Jesus was born to die.

Faith leading to forgiveness has content, and that content includes the death of the incarnate God in His flesh, bearing our sins as our sacrifice for sin, as well as faith in His Resurrection and His dwelling in us by the power of the Holy Spirit. And that faith needs to translate into faithfulness on our part in our daily living and the bearing of the fruits of faith without which our faith weakens and even perhaps dies.

Obedience

Obedience is the fourth concrete action necessary to forgiveness. Obedience itself is part of the dynamic process of progress in the Christian life. Faith dies when obedience fails. When faith fails, the fruit of forgiveness is forfeited. Technically, we might say obedience isn't required for forgiveness, rather it is the fruit of forgiveness. Fair enough. But the fact is, when obedience to God is not forthcoming, the faith to believe in forgiveness drifts away like a boat loosed from its mooring. Obedience has two elements: 1) the *desire* to obey, and 2) the positive *effort* to actually pursue the will of God. Our obedience may never become perfect, but the *desire* to make it perfect must be in place, as well as *effort* to act accordingly.

It must be remembered perfection is not static. It has stages just like our lives. A three month old baby may not be perfect in maturity like a thirty year old man. But a three month old baby can be perfect for a three month old baby. Likewise, our obedience can be perfect for our current stage of spiritual development.

We must know and understand that obedience is not blind submissiveness. It is, quite to the contrary, an active participation on our part with the energies of God. In love for God and in faith we *do* the things of God. Thus obedience is broad and not limited to one unbendable thing we must seek out and do. These four actions: repentance, confession, faith, and obedience are indispensable for forgiveness of sins. Christ had done all for us in His Nativity, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension, but we, with the help of God, must engage ourselves to cooperate with Him, as the Scriptures teach, to carry out His will.

How to Receive God's Grace for Forgiveness

Our God imparts grace freely. But His grace does not just float down to us through the air. He bestows it through channels or vehicles, as it were, things like the Tree of Life in Eden, the ark, the serpent on a pole, a river, bread and wine. The number of those vehicles is perhaps limitless. The Church calls these vehicles of the grace of God sacramental Mysteries. Full, complete and abiding fruit of forgiveness is not experienced apart from these sacramental Mysteries, particularly those of Baptism and the Eucharist. In these Mysteries the grace of forgiveness is imparted to us.

God's Revelation is clear about the relationship between Baptism and forgiveness. On the day of Pentecost, the people called out to the Apostles concerning their salvation, "*Men and brethren, what shall we do?*" And Peter said to them, "*Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*" Acts of the Apostles 2:37, 38. Baptism and forgiveness of sins were linked forever on Day One of the Church. They cannot and must not be separated from each other. Baptism is foundational for forgiveness. In it you were brought into a new agreement, a new covenant with God, in which the forgiveness of your sins is part of God's promise to you.

In Holy Communion, too, there is grace for forgiveness. On the night of the Mystical Supper, Jesus said of the chalice, "*Drink of it, all of you. This is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins*" Matthew 26: 27, 28. In Communion, we partake of the Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world. In the Church of Jesus Christ, the consecrated Bread of the Eucharist is actually called "the Lamb."

Some of the most needy and sincere Christians who earnestly desire to overcome sin, have virtually no access to Communion. Such practice is unacceptable in the sight of the Lord. Believers need Communion regularly because it is part of the grace of forgiveness. We are speaking of life and victory through the Lord's provision. Baptism and the Eucharist are not inventions of man. They are precious gifts of God, taught by our Lord Jesus Christ, testified to in the Scriptures, and known through the centuries in the experience of the Body of Christ.

The Meaning Of Forgiveness

The meaning of forgiveness is broad and deep and its full scope is unfathomable. But there are some specifics we can understand about its meaning. The root meaning of the Greek verb for forgive is "to let go." God, when we repent, confess, believe, lets our sins go! He does not hold them against us. He says, "*Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more*" Hebrews 10:17. This is precisely what God calls us to do when we forgive others their transgressions against us; let them go and remember them no more. A closer look at the extent of what God does and will do about our sins makes a most attractive picture. Consider three facts: 1) God *cleanses* us from our sins, 2) He *pardons* our sins, and 3) He *heals* the consequences of our sins.

It is like the oldest children in a family going down the nearest playground to play a game of touch football. The field is wet and muddy. We remind the youngest children not to get involved in the game with the bigger ones because it is dangerous; they will get hurt. But the younger child disobeys and participates. He gets squished between two of his older huge siblings and ends up flat on the ground with a compound fracture of one of his legs. Now what do the parents do when they learn of these events? First off, they would not say, "You stupid brat. I told you not to play with those guys. It is your own fault. You can just lie there and suffer. It is time you learned to obey."

Even though he disobeyed, the parents would do everything they could to help. Once there, three things would need to happen to take care of the problem in its complexity. The wound must be cleaned. There must be pardon for his disobedience. That is between the child and parent. At some point he is going to have to say, "Dad, I'm sorry I disobeyed you." And the parent will have to reply, "Sonny boy, I forgive you." But cleansing the wound and pardoning the disobedience aren't all that is needed in this situation. Going through life with a sterile compound fracture and a good relationship with your father isn't all that wonderful. The bones need setting and the wound has to be patched up. Healing is vitally needed.

So it is with our sins. We need cleansing. Sin dirties, and that moral dirt needs spiritual scrubbing, as it were. Without cleansing, moral and spiritual infection set in quickly. We need pardon for our sins. The guilt needs to be dealt with in order to prevent estrangement from God. But cleaning and pardoning are not enough. There must also be healing. Sin produces not only dirt and guilt, but also brokenness, sickness, and weakness. There needs to be healing of the heart, the attitudes, even the personality. Without all three we will never know victory over our sinful passions. All three of these, cleansing, pardoning, and healing, God provides in His Incarnate Son, Jesus Christ. There is cleansing through the blood of Christ. There is pardon in Christ's sacrificial death. There is healing in our communion with Christ in the Holy Spirit. With this in view, it is plain to see why the prayer to the Holy Trinity is one of the most loved in our Church.

God's forgiveness, His remission of our sins, is not limited to this life only. All His forgiveness, with its cleansing, pardoning, and healing, have as their goal life everlasting. This knowledge is of great help in the battle against sin here and now.

Maturing In Christian Faith

**Let us, then, go beyond
the initial teaching
about Christ and
advance to maturity,
not laying the foundation all
over again: repentance
from dead works, faith in God,
instruction about baptisms
and laying on of hands,
resurrection of the dead,
and eternal judgement.
And God permitting, we
shall advance!
Hebrews 6: 1-3**

Do not ever stop learning about the wonders of God. Keep open the channels of grace within you. Stay tuned to the Holy Spirit, Who will take you from one level of spiritual understanding to the next, as you nurture the capacity of assimilating the wonders of God's plan for all creation. This Scriptural reminder encourages us to continue on the way to spiritual maturity. We live in an ongoing cosmic classroom with death the final exam.

In order to advance, however, we must rise above the basic units of faith. We know the implications of our baptism, Christ's victory over death, and the final verdict determining our status in the world to come. We have already repented of past sins, and we analyze ourselves daily to test our relationship with the

Lord. Is it possible that we still need to deal with such basic issues of sin and virtue as though we do not know the difference? How much alcohol must we consume before we realize that it is not helping our cause spiritually? How often do we go on reading banal literature and watching the drivel on television before we decide to challenge our minds with something more enlightening and uplifting?

These are the "acts that lead to death" for which we are called to repent. Repentance, in Greek, *metanoia*, means a complete about face. To repent is to turn your mind around, to have a new realistic attitude about God, the world, and yourself. Jesus taught us, *"If you keep my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free"* John 8:31.

To find the truth, you must first sort it out from the noise of the crowd. Inner serenity is imperative; otherwise you are a victim of the delusions and illusions which pass themselves off as genuine lasting reality in our society. To live in these times is to be invaded by unwanted, unhelpful information that constantly bombards our senses. You are force-fed items of passing interest that others have determined to be newsworthy; therefore, you must pay attention: the "trial of the century" involving an ex-athlete; the escapades of so-called celebrities who hardly have an education or any basic social graces, ball scores and stock reports; opinions of pundits and newscasters eager and ignorant enough to offer their parboiled reactions to any or all of the above. None of this information will we take with us to the next world and none of it do we really need here and now.

Believers are invited to look upward and inward, to search for the holiness of life within the universe and themselves. Christ is Risen and you are rising to meet Him. Continue following Him through this lifetime so that when He turns around to look into your face, He will recognize you as one of His own. God forbid you must offer some feeble excuse: You lost your way, or you sat down and pitied yourself, forgetting you were on a journey, or you went off like Adam and Eve to hide your shame in the bushes, or you became so hopelessly fascinated with the glitter and clatter of this world's entertainment, thinking it would never end, so you momentarily forgot all about saving your soul.



Fear Sin

There is only one thing to be feared...only one trial, and that is sin. I have told you this over and over again. All the rest is beside the point, whether you talk of plots, feluds, betrayals, slanders, abuses, confiscations of property, exile, swords, open sea, or universal war. Wherever they may be, they are all fugitive and perishable. They touch the mortal body but wreak no harm on the watchful soul. St. John Chrysostom.

Death, Be Not Proud

Death, Be Not Proud

One of the last things a friend of a friend did years ago was to send identical suicide letters to each of her friends: "Today is my 76th birthday," it began. "Of my own free will I have chosen to take my final passage."

Why should she do such a thing? She was not terminally ill and it would seem, had years of good living to look forward to. But there was a darkness always lurking nearby. She was an admirer of Dr. Jack Kavorkian, then just beginning his now notorious assisted suicide campaign. She had become a member of the Hemlock Society, a so-called "right to die" organization that would later merge with another group and change its name to Compassion & Choices.

After her death, friends found her "suicide file" containing the dog-eared articles hailing suicide as an act of self-empowerment, a beneficial and even uplifting experience. One chilling article was a "how-to" piece, teaching the reader how to commit suicide with drug overdose and plastic bag over one's head, an exact description of her death.

Such is the face of "compassion" as an international movement seeks to convince our culture that euthanasia and assisted suicide are in people's best interest. However, the root meaning of "compassion" is to "suffer with." Hence, in response to the culture of death, members of the Body of Christ must not simply forswear killing, but also provide loving care and principled defense of the sick and suffering they witness around them.

A widespread mentality of the useful, the throwaway culture that today enslaves the hearts and minds of so many, comes at a very high cost: It asks for the elimination of human beings, especially if they are physically or socially

weaker. Our response to this mentality is a decisive and unreserved "YES to life!"

LEGISLATING SUICIDE

Whereas euthanasia involves the direct and intentional killing of another person, assisted suicide is legally defined as providing the means of death for another person to end his or her own life.

Legally, they are distinct realities, but the Church of Jesus Christ opposes unequivocally both. No one can make us or even encourage us to make an attempt on the life of an innocent person without opposing God's love for that person; without violating a fundamental right and therefore without committing a crime of utmost gravity.

The international euthanasia movement made a legislative impact in the United States beginning in the 1990's. In the Hemlock Society, Oregon legalized assisted suicide for the terminally ill by voter referendum in 1994. To date, two other states have passed similar laws. Washington also by referendum in 2004 and Vermont, by state legislature in 2012. Meanwhile, a muddled Montana Supreme Court decision in 2009 ruled that assisted suicide was not against public policy in the Big Sky State, but the exact nature and meaning of the ruling remains a matter of dispute. Similarly, in January 2014, a New Mexico trial judge declared that the state law against assisted suicide was unconstitutional, but the decision is an abeyance as the case is on appeal.

It is important to note that most states continue to explicitly outlaw assisted suicide. Indeed, California, Maine, Michigan and most recently in 2012, Massachusetts, have refused to legalize doctor-prescribed death in voter initiatives in the last 20 years.

Advocates for assisted suicide claim that the United States experience demonstrates thus far that doctor-facilitated death can be conducted without abuses. But there have been abuses in a sense. Just ask Barbara Wagner and Randy Storoup. Both were dying of cancer when their doctors prescribed a regimen of life-extending chemotherapy. Not only would Medicaid – which is rationed in Oregon – not pay for the prescription, but an administrator wrote both patients telling them that the state would fund their assisted suicides. An appalled Wagner said, “Oregon will pay to kill me, but they will not give me medication to try and stop the growth of my cancer.” Compassion indeed!

Americans remain deeply divided on the issue of assisted suicide and euthanasia while most physicians remain ambivalent about engaging in death-causing practice. The nation stands at a crossroads as proponents of doctor-prescribed death develop sleeker ways to market their agenda.

Canada is likewise acutely threatened by euthanasia consciousness. On June 5, Quebec became the first province to legalize doctor assisted suicide by passing Bill 52, a law redefining the lethal practice as a form of health care called “end of life care.” Meanwhile, the Supreme Court of Canada is being asked to declare the federal law against assisted suicide unconstitutional. Disturbingly, and perhaps showing the direction of the currents, the court has decided to hear the case even though it previously ruled that the law against assisted suicide was constitutional.

KILLING ON DEMAND

In order to better see the choice in front of them, North Americans need only look as the depravity in several European countries where euthanasia has been accepted.

Euthanasia was decriminalized in certain cases in the Netherlands after a 1973 court ruling permitted the practice as long as doctors followed protective

guidelines requiring, for instance, repeated requests, second opinions and unbearable suffering that cannot otherwise be alleviated. This system continued until 2002, at which time lethally injecting or assisting the suicides of qualified patients was formally legalized.

Over the decades, Dutch euthanasia expanded steadily, from the terminally ill who ask for it, to more seriously chronically ill who ask for it, to people with serious disabilities who ask for it, to those suffering from existential anguish or mental illness and who, in their despair, want to die.

The number of euthanasia deaths in the Netherlands is rising, including among the mentally ill, and the vulnerable elderly, are increasingly at risk. Euthanasia is now permitted in the Netherlands for early dementia as well as those with non-life threatening conditions, even those who want to die because they are “tired of life.”

Euthanasia has even entered the pediatric wards. While it remains technically murder under Dutch law, infanticide in the name of “mercy” has become so acceptable that pediatrics professor published a bureaucratic checklist designed to help doctors determine which terminally ill or severely disabled infants could be euthanized. *The Groningen Protocols*, as it is well known, was ratified by the Dutch National Association of Pediatricians and even published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

Belgium likewise formally legalized euthanasia in 2002. The law allows broad access to doctor-facilitated death when “the patient is in a medically futile condition of constant unbearable physical or mental suffering.” Some Belgian doctors have interpreted their liberal license so broadly that it amounts to death-on-demand.

Consider well-documented examples: The euthanasia of elderly couples who preferred immediate death more than eventual widowhood; of deaf twins, who

asked to be killed together when both began losing their eyesight; of a depressed anorexia patient who wanted to die after being sexually exploited by her psychiatrist; of a transsexual repelled by the results of sex-change surgery.

Recently, in February 2014, the Belgian parliament expanded its law to include child euthanasia with no lower age limit.

Lastly, Switzerland has taken Jack Kevorkian as its model, creating a cottage industry of “suicide treatment tourism”, a term that describes the flow of people traveling to the country’s legal suicide clinics to end their lives with the assistance of doctors and nurses.

Like Kevorkian in the United States in the 1990’s, these clinics do not restrict their services to the terminally ill. For example, in recent months an elderly Italian woman committed suicide at a Swiss clinic because she was upset about losing her looks. Her family only learned about her death when the clinic mailed the urn containing her ashes.

Swiss death clinics are becoming increasingly popular. Dignitas, one of the most active of the Swiss suicide clinics, recently published its death statistics for the last year. They tell an alarming story: 1,705 have died in that one clinic alone since 1998, including 204 – about four per week – in 2013.

PEDDLING DEATH

At the battle between the culture of life and the culture of death wages on, it is essential to recognize the terms of the public debate. Proponents of euthanasia and assisted suicide use all sorts of propaganda to push and hide their agenda. This is particularly true in the United States where disingenuous advocates play word games and deploy euphemisms as honey to help the poison go down. Thus, rather than using the accurate term, “assisted suicide,” they instead call

doctor-prescribed death “aid in dying,” or “death with dignity.” They even deny that the suicide of a terminally ill person is actually suicide.

Assisted suicide activists also try to confuse the public by conflating the unethical acts they advocate with appropriate measures to alleviate suffering at the end of life. For example, some will claim that refusing unwanted medical treatment is the same as assisted suicide. But this, of course, is not true. In fact, the United States Supreme Court recognized in a unanimous 1997 decision that there is a critical ethical and legal difference between assisting suicide which states can outlaw, and refusing unwanted life-sustaining medical treatment.

There is also the position of the Church of Jesus Christ. When death is clearly imminent and inevitable, one can in conscience refuse forms of treatment that would secure a precarious and burdensome prolongation of life, so long as the normal care due to the sick person in similar cases is not interrupted.

Assisted suicide advocates also claim that causing death by overdose is permitted under the ethical principle of “double effect,” which states that an act that produces a bad result is still considered ethical if four conditions are met: 1) the action taken in this case, treating pain, is “good” or morally neutral; 2) The bad effect, in this case death, is not intended; 3) the good effect, in this case, the relief of suffering, cannot be brought about by an act designed to intentionally cause the bad effect, death; 4) There is a proportionate and sufficiently grave reason to perform the act, in this case, the presence of severe and unbearable pain.

Euthanasia and assisted suicide unquestionably fail the requirements of double effect, since the hoped for good, namely, relief of suffering, is accomplished by intentionally causing the bad effect which is death.

Euthanasia and assisted suicide are very bad medicine and even worse public policy. The Church of Jesus Christ favors a more human, reasonable, and

compassionate Christ-like vision that leads society toward a better positive way: Care for, no kill. Embrace, not abandon. Suffer with, not dispose of.

The greatest deprivation experienced by the aged is not the weakening of one's physical body, not the disability that may result from this. Rather, it is the abandonment, exclusion and deprivation of love.

Believers in Jesus Christ must respond to the culture of death not only with reasoned arguments and understanding, but with loving action and viable faith that gives testimony to the august dignity of life with which we have been gifted.



Saint Pantelemon The All-Merciful

The holy and great Martyr, Pantelemon was born in Nicomedia of a Christian mother, Evoulis and a pagan father, Evstorgius. He studied medicine as a young man and became a physician. The priest Hermolaus befriended him and instructed him in the Christian faith and subsequently baptized him. Pantelemon miraculously healed a blind man whom other physicians had treated in vain. Healed in the name of Christ, he baptized him. From jealousy, the doctors denounced Pantelemon as a Christian and he went before the emperor Maximilian for judgment. He stood before the earthly ruler in the body, but his mind and soul were before the heavenly King. He freely declared himself a believer in Christ before the Emperor and in his presence, healed a paralytic of a long standing infirmity.

This miracle brought many of the pagans in the vicinity to Christ. The Emperor then put him to torture in an attempt to seduce him away from Christ, but the Lord appeared to him on several occasions and delivered him whole and uninjured. When he would not abandon Christ for the idols, he was stretched across a rack and burned with candles. Then he was thrown into a pit of fire and given over to wild beasts.

But Jesus appeared to him and kept him whole and unharmed. The idol worshippers believed it was perverse sorcery of a type they could not comprehend. He was thrown into a river with a large stone attached to him, but it floated with him. When he was finally retrieved, he was sentenced to beheading.

Condemned to death once again, St. Pantelemon knelt in prayer. Initially, the executioner gave him a blow on the neck with his sword and the sword broke as if made of wax. The executioner could not kill him until he had finished his prayer and had himself given the word of consent to be beheaded.

He offered his soul to Christ under an olive tree, which after that became laden with fruit and whose oil was utilized in anointing the sick. His name, Pantelemon means "all-merciful." He was thus named because he eagerly cured many without accepting any earthly remuneration. God the all-merciful received his righteousness and goodness of soul and glorified him among the saints and citizens of heaven. His relics remain incorrupt until this day. This wonderful martyr suffered with honor as a young man for Christ on July 27, 304 when he was but 29 years of age.

Orthodox believers appeal in their intercessory prayers to St. Pantelemon when afflicted with disease and illness. He has shown himself to be eager to grant assistance. Just as he gladly was a channel and vehicle for God's healing grace while alive in the flesh, so today, in glorified spirit, he comes to us if we dispose ourselves to the working of Christ's grace and makes us whole in our brokenness and infirmity.

St. Pantelemon is patron of physicians and medicine and his feast is celebrated on the day of his passing into eternity. A worthy meditation and prayer for his feast day is affirming our eagerness to be made whole and healed of whatever affliction limits us in glorifying our God as his choice creation. Make it a holy habit to be prayerfully present at the monthly healing services.

VESPER VERSES ACCORDING TO THE EIGHT TONES

TONE 6

1. O Christ, You conquered the Abyss, You
ascended the cross,
You raised those who stood in the shadow of
death.
You are the only one free among the dead.
From your light you give life.
Almighty Savior, have mercy on us!
2. Today Christ has conquered death.
He is risen as he said;
He has given joy to the world.
Let us all sing a hymn and say
“ O Source of life, unapproachable light,
Almighty Lord, have mercy on us! ”
3. O Lord, you are present everywhere :
Where can we poor sinners flee?
Heaven is where you dwell;
In the Abyss, you conquered death;
In the depths of the sea,
Your powerful hand is there, O Lord.
We come to you, and we worship you saying :
“ O Lord risen from the dead, have mercy on
us! ”
4. We take pride in your cross, O Christ;
We praise and glorify you resurrection.
You are our God :
We know no other.

5. Glory be to your power, O Lord!
You have destroyed the power of death;
You have renewed us by your cross;
You have granted us life and great mercy.
6. We bless the Lord at all times;
We sing of his resurrection :
By accepting the cross, He has destroyed
death.
7. By your burial, O Lord,
You have broken and destroyed the bonds of
death.
Your resurrection has enlightened the world.
O Lord, glory be to You!
8. Glory be to the Father **+**, and to the Son,
and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and
forever. Amen.

Who would not call you blessed, Mother of
God?

Who would not praise your virginal birth-
giving?

The only-begotten Son, born of the Father
before all ages,

Has become incarnate of you in a manner
beyond understanding.

God by nature has taken the nature of man
for us.

Not divided into two persons, He has two
natures

without mixture or confusion.

O most pure and holy, intercede with him
That He may have mercy on our souls.

At the Apostichon

1. Your resurrection, O Christ our Savior,
The angels in heaven praise with hymns!

Make us on earth also worthy with a pure heart
To extol and give glory to You.

2. You broke the gates of the Abyss; You broke
its bonds :

You are God almighty.

You raised our fallen race.

We sing to you :

“ O Lord, risen from the dead, glory be to
You! ”

3. Christ willed to save us from corruption :

He was crucified, buried in the tomb.

The faithful women sought him.

In tears they said :

“ O Savior of all, how did you accept burial?

Hew were you stolen, how taken away?

Which place holds your life-giving body?

Appear to us, O Lord, as you promised.

Wipe away our tears. ”

While they wept, an angel appeared saying :

“ Enough tears : go tell the disciples the news :

The Lord is risen

Granting forgiveness and mercy to the
world. ”

4. Freely you accepted death;

You conquered death by your burial;

You arose on the third day in glory as God;

You granted eternal life and mercy to the
world.

5. Glory be to the Father ✚, and to the Son,
and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and
forever. Amen.

Christ is the Lord, my Maker and Savior.
He came from your womb in my likeness,
O most pure Lady.
He freed Adam from the ancestral curse.
O Virgin since you are the mother of God,
We never cease calling upon you.
As the angel, we also say :
“ Hail, Lady, Advocate, shield and salvation
of our souls! ”

HAVE YOU TALKED TO GOD LATELY?

Does God speak to us? When we read the Old Testament, we find countless examples of God talking directly to some of the main characters of these early books of Scripture. In Genesis, we find Him speaking to Adam and Eve. He converses repeatedly with Moses, instructing him every step of the way as Moses leads the Israelites to the Promised Land. In the New Testament, everyone present at Christ's baptism heard the booming voice of God the Father from heaven saying "This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased."

But how about today? Does God STILL speak to common, ordinary people like us? The answer is "yes." Now I know everyone is thinking: I've never heard Him. But you have - or at least you should have - in so many ways. You may not have heard His voice talking directly to you. But we have all heard Him throughout our lifetime. He speaks to us when our prayers are answered. He speaks to us when we are troubled and are trying to make a proper decision. He speaks to us when we choose to obey God's Law rather than give in to temptation. A thought may occur to us and lead us to a specific action . . . that's God's way of speaking to us.

Yes, God still tries to speak to all of us. The problem is: we aren't always listening! Often, our thoughts and our lives are cluttered with so many things. We worry about so much . . . we try to deal with everything on our own. Consequently, we crowd out that one voice that we need to hear to help and guide us: THE VOICE OF GOD. In Psalm 46:10, we read these words: BE STILL AND KNOW THAT I AM GOD. In Hebrew, it translates a bit more powerfully: SURRENDER, and know that I am God. When we are willing to turn everything over to Him and do what we are asked to do again and again in our services: commend ourselves, one another and all our life to Christ our God, then God will be able to speak to us quite clearly.

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