

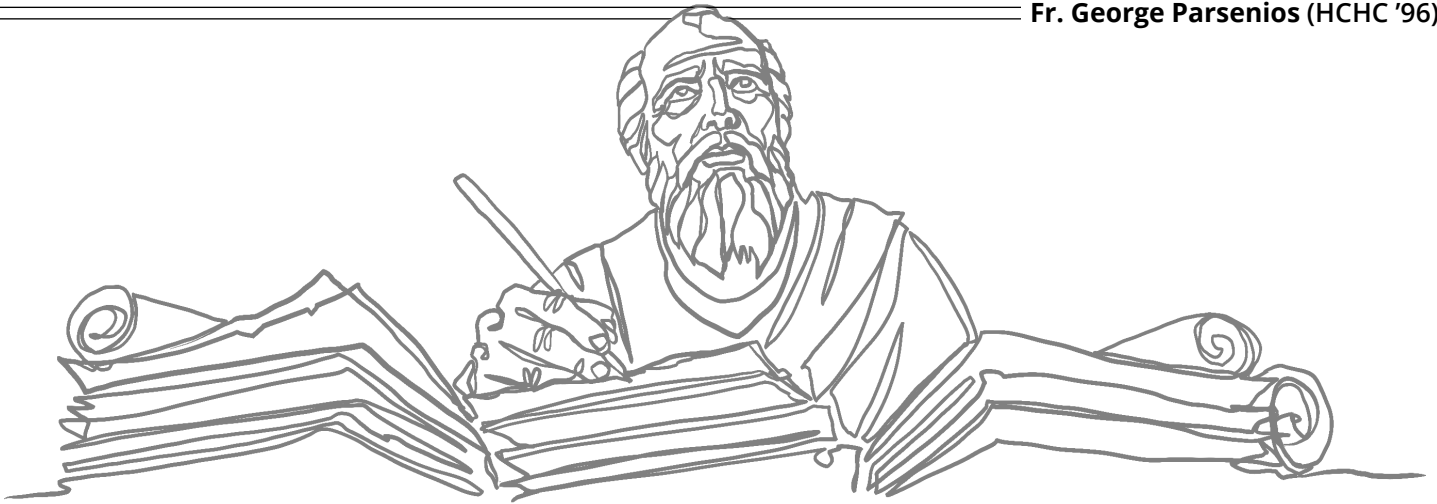


DIAKONIA

A National Ministry of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America

REFLECTIONS FROM TODAY'S READING | *1 Corinthians 15:1-11*

Fr. George Parsenios (HCHC '96)



“According to the Scriptures...”

St. Paul's letters were not written to us: when we read them, we are reading someone else's mail. But these letters sit at the heart of sacred Scripture, because St. Paul never gave his readers a simple solution to solve a single problem. Rather, he used each individual problem as an example of how to solve every problem. To paraphrase a common expression, he didn't feed his readers for a single day by simply giving them a fish. He fed them for the rest of their lives by teaching them how to fish. Consequently, he has taught us how to fish as well. In today's epistle reading, we see St. Paul laying the groundwork to correct errors about the Resurrection that had crept into the Corinthian Church. He addressed this issue in the rest of chapter 15. It is not entirely clear what the Corinthians thought about the Resurrection, but whatever they thought was wrong. In response to

their error, St. Paul shows us how to resolve not only this problem, but every problem that Christians might face. First, he grounds his teaching in the tradition of the Church when he says, “I delivered to you what I also received.” Paul did not invent the Gospel, and he is not changing the Gospel. He received the Gospel from those who were before him—and indeed, from Christ Himself (Gal. 1:11–12)—and he passes it on without alteration. Second, he grounded his teaching about the Resurrection in the Bible, saying that Jesus died and rose “according to the Scriptures.” The teaching of the Church is grounded in Scripture and Tradition. Following the example of the great Apostle Paul, in responding to question we encounter—from something mundane or murky that puzzles us, to an elaborate heresy that menaces us—we must ground our theological work in Scripture and Tradition.

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FROM THE ORIGINAL GREEK: *neôkoros* (νεωκόρος)

What does “sacristan” mean?

Fr. George Parsenios (HCHC '96)



The person who cares for and cleans a Greek Orthodox Church is traditionally referred to as the *νεωκόρος/neôkoros*. The title is usually translated into English as “sacristan,” but the word *νεωκόρος/*

neôkoros is not original to Christianity. The term was a title for a temple attendant in ancient Greek religion. It comes from the Greek word *νεώς* (an older variant of *ναός/naos*), which means “temple,” and from the verb *κορέω/koreô*, which means “to sweep” or “to clean.” As the name implies, the *neôkoros* was among the priestly crew assigned to a

temple, and his job was to keep the sanctuary clean and supplied with its necessary vessels. In some times and places, other duties fell to the *neôkoros* as well. Interestingly, the term *neôkoros* would come to designate not only people who were custodians of a temple, but entire cities who were the caretakers of major religious centers. In the Acts of the Apostles 19:35, an official from the city of Ephesus proudly says that the city of Ephesus is known throughout the world as the *neôkoros* of the temple of Artemis. Roman emperors would give the title *neôkoros* to cities which had built temples in honor of the emperor himself, sometimes more than once to compound the honor.



*St. Catherine's Monastery, Mt. Sinai (1898).
Library of Congress*

THIS WEEK'S LOOK AT CHURCH HISTORY

A Season of Creation

The Orthodox liturgical year begins on September 1st. In the past, this date coincided with the beginning of the Byzantine civil year, known as the Indiction. Recent decades, however, have seen September 1st acquire a fresh, though no less authentically Orthodox significance. Since 1989, the Ecumenical Patriarchate has recognized September 1st as a Day of Prayer for Creation—acknowledging the full gravity of the present ecological crisis but calling for repentance rather than retribution, and counseling hope rather than fear.

Apart from issuing an annual Indiction encyclical addressing themes relevant to creation care, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew commissioned the foremost hymnographer of Mt. Athos, Gerasimos Mikrayiannanites (who has since been canonized), to specially compose an Office of Vespers for the Preservation of Creation. By 1992, the Day of Prayer for Creation was officially a Pan-Orthodox phenomenon. Soon, the World Council of Churches (2008) and the Roman Catholic Church (2015) followed the Orthodox Church's lead, establishing a “Season of Creation” stretching from September 1st to October 4th, concluding on the feast of St. Francis of Assisi.



Why Non-Orthodox are Excluded from the Sacrament of Holy Communion

Photographer: Brittainy Newman

Fr. Charles Bell, Ph.D

In the light of Church history, the question might better be asked, "Why does anyone allow for 'open communion?'" From the very beginning the Eucharist was offered only to baptized and chrismated believers. The second century writing known as *The Didache* instructs believers to "let no one eat or drink from your Eucharist except those who are baptized in the Lord's Name." So restricted were the Eucharistic meetings of Christians in the first centuries that rumors arose among the pagans that they were actually involved in human sacrifice and cannibalism.

Even reformed churches practiced closed communion. Only baptized believers who had undergone examination by the leaders of the churches were admitted to the Lord's Supper. In times past, communion tokens were used to gain admission to the sacrament in the Church of Scotland and also in Methodist churches.

The Orthodox Church does not consider it sufficient to express belief in Jesus to be admitted to the sacrament. Many heretics believe in Jesus. Arius, the fourth century heretic, believed in Jesus. Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons and Hindus believe in Jesus. But none of these believes in the One Lord Jesus Christ known and proclaimed by the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church.

In the historic understanding of the Church, Communion has always been understood as the goal, the climax and expression of our unity in Christ. Today there are over 25,000 denominations worldwide and among them are many different views of Jesus.

Orthodox Christians practice closed communion, not for triumphalistic reasons, but for very important theological reasons. In doing so they follow the practice of the ancient Church; a practice that was retained by the Reformers. "Open communion" was a relatively recent innovation and an exception to the practice of the Church beginning in the New Testament period.

In our pluralistic American culture, we object to anything that excludes. We have been taught that all faiths are relative in their claims. One denomination is said to be as good as another, and the Orthodox Church appears to be just one more "denomination." However, the Orthodox Church pre-dates denominations, and the practice of the Orthodox Church pre-dates the practices of later Christian denominations by at least 1500 years.



FAITH IN ACTION

Make it Personal. Only by the grace of God are we worthy to receive Holy Communion. Pray the Prayer before Holy Communion each Sunday before coming forward to receive the sacrament.



MAZE

Camel in the Needle

Help the camel find the tiny needle! This maze teaches an important lesson from Jesus' lesson that we heard in today's Gospel: it can be hard for people who are too focused on their riches to follow God's path. God wants us to love Him more than our possessions. When we trust God and share with others, our hearts become lighter, and we can follow the path He has for us.

Just For Kids!
(...and the young at heart)

