He holds in front of our eyes earthly honors and false values, making them seem more preferable to the heavenly ones. In our businesses, he sets up ways for us to earn profits by shady means. His tactics have many facets and he is very wily, but we must be wary and always alert. St. Peter tells us, “Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith….May the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus—after you have suffered a while—perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you.” (1 Pet. 5: 8-10)

So long as we live on this earth, our challenges will never disappear. But as long as we have the desire to please God and walk according to His commandments, grace and Divine help will always be granted to us. This will allow us to be in a blessed state of communion with God, which is truly the goal of all our labors and ascetic endeavors. We must do everything for the glory of God by the grace of the Holy Spirit. We also must be defiant towards the sin, which wants to control and defeat us. We need constant reminder that in facing our challenges, “we do not lose heart” (2 Cor. 4: 16), because “God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind” (2 Tim. 1: 7). Through the intercessions of the Holy Theotokos, may our Lord always sustain our weaknesses, by the Grace of the Holy Spirit, so we can face our adversary and his challenges and in the end be victorious in our struggle.

Book Review

On the Apostolic Preaching | By St. Irenaeus of Lyons

On the Apostolic Preaching was written by St. Irenaeus of Lyons, a disciple of Polycarp, who was a disciple of St. John the evangelist. It was written to explain and defend the grounds of Christianity through the use of scripture. Despite the fact that the New or Old Testaments were not fully compiled into one book at his time, Irenaeus still cites several verses from the New and Old Testaments, regarding them as scripture. From the Old Testament, he is able to draw out prophecies of Christ, his birth from a virgin, his miracles, his resurrection, and such.

Irenaeus believes that to understand scripture, one must use scripture; thus Irenaeus’ main goal in the apostolic preaching is to give readers an understanding of the Old Testament, how Christ fulfilled the prophecies, and how the Old Testament shapes the whole Christian revelation itself. The demonstration aims to unfold the content of Scripture that pertains to the revelation of Jesus Christ as preached by the apostles and to recognize the scriptural authority of that preaching by demonstrating that the apostles’ proclamation of what was fulfilled had been prophesied in Scripture. The demonstration is a dialogue of sorts which discusses the prophecies and their meaning in a language simple enough for all to understand.

St. Basil

“Sound the trumpet at the new moon,” says the Psalmist, “in the notable day of your feast.” This injunction is prophetic. The Scripture readings indicate to us more loudly than any trumpet and more distinctly than any musical instrument the Feast that precedes these days. For we have learned from Isaiah the Grace to be gained from the fasts. Isaiah rejected the Jewish way of fasting and showed us what true fasting means. “Fast not for quarrels and strifes, but loose every bond of iniquity.” And the Lord says: “Be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance, but anoint thine head, and wash thy face.” Let us, therefore, exhibit the demeanor that we have been taught, not being doleful about the coming days, but maintaining a joyful attitude, as befits holy people. No one who desponds is crowned; no one who sulks sets up a trophy of victory. Do not be sullen while you are being healed. It would be absurd not to rejoice over the health of your soul, but rather to be distressed over a change of diet and to give the impression of setting more store by the pleasure of your stomach than by the care of your soul. For satiety brings delight to the stomach, whereas fasting brings profit to the soul. Be of good cheer, for the physician has given you a medicine that destroys sin. For, just as the tapeworms that breed in the intestines of children are obliterated by certain very pungent drugs, so also fasting — a remedy truly worthy of its appellation — when introduced into the soul, kills off the sin that lurks deep within it...
Anoint thine head, and wash thy face.” This sentence summons you to mysteries. One who has been anointed has received unction; he who has been washed has been cleansed. Apply this injunction to your inner members. Wash your soul clean of sins. Have your head anointed with holy oil, so that you might become a partaker of Christ, and approach the fast in this spirit. Do not disfigure your face as do the hypocrites. The face is disfigured when one’s inner disposition is obscured by a sham external appearance, concealed by falsehood as if beneath a veil. An actor in a theatre is one who assumes someone else’s persona — if he is a slave, he often plays a master, and if he is a private citizen, he plays a king. Likewise, in this life, as if on some stage, the majority of people turn their existence into a theatre, entertaining one thing in their hearts, but displaying something else to men by their outward appearance. Therefore, do not disfigure your face. Whatever you may be, appear as such. Do not transform yourself into a sullen person, seeking the glory that comes from appearing to be abstemious. For there is no profit in trumpeting your good deeds, nor any gain in advertising your fasting. Things that are done for outward show do not yield any fruit in the age to come, but terminate in human praise. Run with gladness to the gift of the fast. Fasting is an ancient gift, which does not grow old or become outmoded, but is ever renewed and flourishes with vigor.

Do you think that I am resting the origin of fasting on the Law? Why, fasting is even older than the Law. If you wait a little, you will discover the truth of what I have said. Do not suppose that fasting originated with the Day of Atonement, appointed for Israel on the tenth day of the seventh month. No, go back through history and inquire into the ancient origins of fasting. It is not a recent invention; it is an heirloom handed down by our fathers. Everything distinguished by antiquity is venerable. Have respect for the antiquity of fasting. It is as old as humanity itself; it was prescribed in Paradise. It was the first commandment that Adam received: “Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil ye shall not eat.” Through the words “ye shall not eat” the law of fasting and abstinence is laid down. If Eve had fasted from the tree, we would not now be in need of this fast. “They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.” We have been wounded through sin; we are healed through repentance, but repentance without fasting is fruitless. “Cursed is the ground.... Thorns and thistles shall it bring forth for thee.” You were ordered to live in sorrow, not in luxury. Make amends to God through fasting. Yet even life in Paradise is an image of fasting, not only insofar as man, sharing the life of the Angels, attained to likeness with them through being contented with little, but also insofar as those things which human ingenuity subsequently invented had not yet been devised by those living in Paradise, be it the drinking of wine, the slaughter of animals, or whatever else befuddles the human mind.

**Our Challenges as Christians**

By: Fr. Moses Samaan

As we live in this world, we are bound to face difficulties and sometimes feel bombarded by troubles from all directions. At one time or another, we may seek assistance, support, or encouragement from someone higher than ourselves. This is an innate longing in all of us. As we stand at the crossroads, where do we go for guidance and direction? Where do we find help to face the perplexities of life, as we know them here on earth? Who can provide us with the aid and support we need to overcome and prevail?

For some, the answers may not be easy or simple. But for us, as Christian believers, the answer should be clear, because it reveals the core of our understanding of what spirituality truly means, as well as the deep inter-relation between our physical and spiritual needs. Satisfying our material needs is not bad or evil, but the spiritual needs are more important and cannot be satisfied by material resources. In fact, satisfying our spiritual needs solves many if not all of the problems we face on a daily basis. For us, as Christians, the assistance we need is Divine help, the “Grace of God”. It is a gift given to each of us if we wish to accept it. This is the central paradox! It is an immense and powerful energy given universally and without exception. Yet, the secret of unlocking this energy lies within each of us. By our own free will, we choose to accept grace or reject it.

This power sanctifies, strengthens, nourishes, and perfects us so we can have communion with our Creator, Who is the source of all power and goodness within us. Only then will we be able to face life’s perplexities and troubles without failing and crumbling under what seems to be a heavy load. St. Paul tells us, “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God.” ( Eph. 2:8) We are worthy of this gift not because of our own good works, but because of God’s divine love. Therefore, our holiness and sanctification, as well as every loving work and service we perform is attributed to the power and grace of the Holy Spirit, only when we allow Him to work through us. We receive this divine power of the Holy Spirit in Baptism, but determination through fervent prayer is required so we can remain belonging to God. In other words, it is a blessed state, which requires a victorious struggle against the devil so we can live in communion with God. But we must not “quench the Spirit within us.” (1 Thess. 5:19)

Will this challenge and struggle be easy? Of course not! The devil and his angels explore each of us individually to find our weaknesses. He is very tactful in his attacks. He offers appealing visions to our eyes, music to our ears, and to each of our senses something tempting to make us sin. Our tongues may speak evil of others or lie and our hands may not do work to glorify God.

[Continued on Pg.4]