

H. E. Metropolitan Cleopas of Sweden

INTERPETATION OF ST. PAUL'S LETTER TO THE ROMANS 12: 2-12



Charta Oecumenica – celebration of 20th Anniversary

H. E. Metropolitan Cleopas of Sweden

INTERPETATION OF ST. PAUL'S LETTER TO THE ROMANS 12: 2-12

St. Paul, in the second half of his letter to the Romans, which begins with chapter 12, sends moral instructions and practical exhortations to the faithful so they can lead a Christian life faithfully. St. Paul is not a moralist but a theologian, and his morality is grounded in theology.

Each one of us possesses different gifts, depending on the grace we have received

and the degree of our faith. Through the sacrament of Baptism, which inducts Christians into a new life in the faith, the Holy Spirit dwells in their souls and endows them with gifts. The Holy Spirit grants these gifts, giving to each of us corresponding gifts that are used for the benefit of all.

Afterwards, the Apostle mentions certain gifts, beginning with the gift of prophecy, which has a two-fold significance. It is a teaching that foretells the future, while also revealing those things that are hidden. Specific reference is made here to the prophecy of the New Testament that manifested itself on the day of Pentecost. St. John Chrysostom offers the interpretation that “even though prophecy is a gift, it is not given coincidentally, but according to the measure that each of the recipients can accept.”

St. John Chrysostom explains that “ministry” refers to all types of ecclesiastical work. The apostles, the deacons, the aides to the apostles, the teachers, etc. undertake it along with their faith. All forms of ministry are connected to Christ Himself, Who, through His teaching and example, became the first deacon and servant. The Lord Himself distributes ministries to His faithful through the Holy Spirit. It is the duty of each of the faithful to complete their ministry with care and fullness.

As the letter progresses, there is mention of “paraclesis,” which takes on multiple meanings. We can approach an understanding of its meaning if we correlate it to the Holy Spirit, Which is called the Paraclete, because its work is the very act of paraclesis or comforting. Here, Chrysostom explains – and Theodoret of Cyrus adds to this – that this is a sort of teaching “to encourage virtue.”

After making specific reference to three ministries – prophecy (preaching), teaching, and paraclesis – the Apostle changes the syntax as he continues his letter. He does not mention the variety of gifts, but instead emphasizes the manner in which those who possess them should administer the Church. He who possesses a gift should generously offer of his goods and distribute them to those who are in need. However, they are obliged to offer this service in a spirit of simplicity, and generosity.

The Proistamenos– in other words, the person who holds an administrative position in the Church – ought to conduct his ministry with zeal. There is also a mention of the person who shows mercy – in other words, the person who empathizes with others.

After St. Paul the Apostle instructs those who received gifts how to handle their various gifts, he now concludes with the gift of love, which represents the quality of Christian communion. The Apostle advises the Romans to ensure that their love is sincere and free of hypocrisy, and that it is manifested through works of sacrifice and offering. He also points out that Christians should avoid wickedness and evil,

while remaining attached to and focused on what is good.

Next, the letter captures his encouragement to the faithful to listen to other believers as caring brethren, presenting the concept of “philadelphia” (brotherly love). When displaying brotherly love, the faithful must also be caring. Care adds intensity, and gentleness to love. According to St. Basil the Great, care renders “the disposition of him who loves toward the person being loved fervent and ardent.” This disposition must be strengthened by the sense of honor reserved for each of our brethren, under the condition that we offer honor in a genuine sense of modesty, thus securing the unity of the Church in this manner.

Bringing this chapter to a close, St. Paul reminds the reader that all the faithful must display eagerness and zeal for every godly work. The burning desire for the Lord and His ministry keeps the faithful vigilant. A prerequisite for the faithful to succeed in all these things is to possess hope, which represents a betrothal to the Holy Spirit, a foretaste of salvation. The joy that comes from hope is the weapon with which to confront temptation. Possessing the joy and hope of the Holy Spirit, Christians can face sorrow with patience, forbearance, and happiness. Divine patience leads to salvation and redemption!

