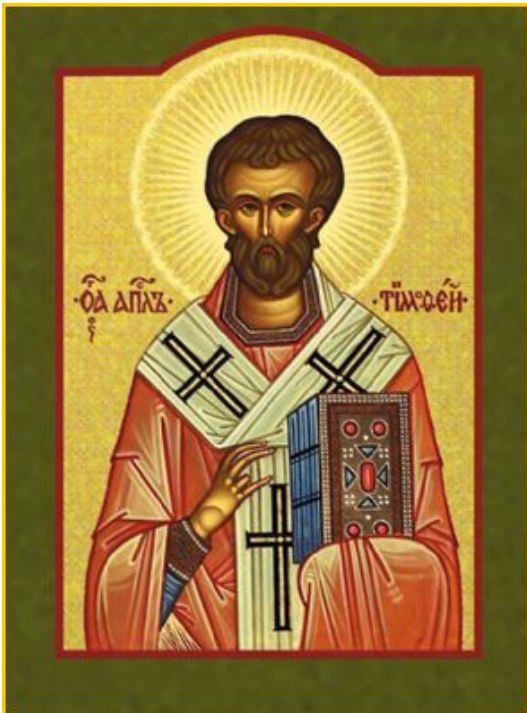


Itching Ears

This weekly bulletin insert complements the curriculum published by the Department of Christian Education of the Orthodox Church in America. This and many other Christian Education resources are available at <http://dce.oca.org>.



Saint Paul expresses his concern about people being led away from the true faith in 2 Timothy 3:16-4:4. This passage is one of the readings for December 20.

The seriousness of Paul's concern is evident in the way he tells Timothy to "preach the word, be urgent in and out of season, convince, rebuke and exhort, be unfailing in patience and in teaching." Knowing that he himself is destined in the near future to face death for the faith, Paul places this big responsibility on the much younger man.

In the next verses, Paul reveals the reasons for his worry. He warns Timothy that a time is coming when people "will not endure sound teaching." Paul knows that some people will find the challenge of living by Christian teachings too difficult, which is why they will not or cannot endure those teachings. Some Bible translations use the words "put up with" or "tolerate" in place of "endure," but the meaning is the same.

It is these people who are described by Paul as having "itching ears." They want to hear something novel, and will seek teachers who "suit their own likings." These teachers will let them "turn away from listening to the truth and wander into myths."

In the verse that follows this day's reading, Paul tells Timothy to "be steady" and "endure suffering." If a person stays steadily on the course of Christian truth, Paul is saying, suffering will inevitably follow. There are many with "itching ears" who reject, ridicule and persecute both the truth and the teachers who profess it.

On December 21 we read the final verses of this second letter to Timothy (4: 9-22). Here Paul describes a person who gave in to the temptation of "itching ears." He writes about Demas, who had been his companion and fellow worker. Now Paul must sadly admit that "Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica." Though we don't know the details of Demas' work with Paul, he must have been a valued helper who had once been attracted by the Gospel. But its requirements were too much for him, and he listened to other voices that promised an easier, less demanding path. He was willing to abandon the way of life that he had shared with Paul and those who worked with him.

The end of the letter shows how much Paul valued companionship, and how painful a desertion like that of Demas must have been. He asks Timothy twice to join him, and to make sure he arrives before winter. He affectionately names faithful believers who have supported him. To hearten Timothy, he includes greetings from specific people and from "all the brethren."

Kontakion - Tone 4

The Church ever sees you as a shining star, O apostle Timothy,
Your miracles have manifested great enlightenment.
Therefore we cry out to Christ:
"Save those who with faith honor Your apostle, O Most Merciful One."

Paul is well aware that these brethren, like Demas, could be tempted by "itching ears" to listen to false teachers promising a pleasant life. So he places all his friends in God's care with his final words: "The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you."