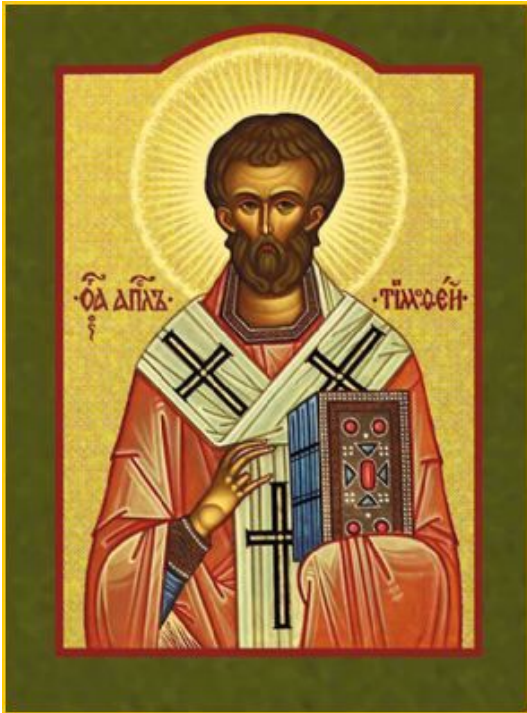


Rigor and Gentleness

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>.



On November 24th we read I Timothy 5:22-6:11. This letter is one of a group of three (the others are II Timothy and Titus) called the Pastoral Epistles. They are meant to guide a young man in leading his flock, and to warn him about problems he will face in the Church.

In the first few verses of the passage we see uncompromising instruction followed immediately by compassionate concern. Timothy is admonished not to be hasty in the "laying on of hands", which may have to do with ordination or with the reinstatement into the Church's sacramental life of people who have repented of sin. In either case, it is a serious responsibility, calling for sound judgment and careful deliberation. The words are sober and forceful.

But in the very next verse, the words become almost motherly in tone: "No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments." This is an unabashedly personal, loving expression of care for another "worker in Christ's vineyard." The early followers of Our Lord understood the difficulties and demands of leadership, as well as the stress and anxiety it could cause. They were, with few exceptions, supportive of each other and ready to help, to advise, and to encourage.

Chapter 6 begins by addressing the relations between slaves and masters. It shows how particularly difficult life was for a slave who was a Christian and had a "believing master." The words warn slaves not to assume that they can behave casually toward their masters because those masters are their brothers in Christ. Slaves are told only to serve "all the better" because as believers their masters are God's beloved. This is a rigorous requirement for the one in servitude, yet it gives slaves a high spiritual purpose: to serve with dedication and by so doing make sure that "the name of God and the teaching may not be defamed."

Verse 10 contains some well-known words: "The love of money is the root of all evil." This terse statement also sets a rigorous standard concerning the appropriate Christian attitude toward wealth. But the words that directly follow are not so well-known, and once again they reflect a gentle concern for those who have fallen into the trap of caring too much for money: "...it is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced their hearts with many pangs." This is not condemnation, but sincere compassion for people who are overwhelmed by something that is not good for them. If Christians are called to follow certain principles rigorously, it is because worldly temptations will cause them suffering if they do not.

The next verse ends the reading. It is another exhortation to young Christian leaders to be strong and to set a good example. They are encouraged to "aim at" six things. The six are righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, and, like a "cap" to all the rest, gentleness.