My Beloved Ones,

In this week’s reading from the Second Epistle to the Corinthians, St. Paul connects God’s first covenant with the Israelites to the covenant fulfilled through Christ’s Passion & Resurrection.

Quoting from various Old Testament books (like the Prophets Ezekiel & Jeremiah, and from the Book of Leviticus) the Apostle Paul says, “Brethren, you are the temple of the living God; as God said, ‘I will live in them and move among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore come out from them, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch nothing unclean; then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.’ Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, and make holiness perfect in the fear of God” (2 Corinthians 6:16-18; 7:1).

Though the whole of this passage seems simple, what does it truly mean to be a temple of the living God? When we think about the ancient Israelites’ relationship to the Temple, it was a place approached with fear and reverence, for it was understood that God’s Holy Spirit was to be found inside the Altar, and only the High Priest could go in. This sense of reverence is still kept in our churches today, as the iconostasion separates the Holy of Holies from the rest of the Sanctuary. And, when we look at our beautiful home parishes, or a temple like the Panagia Chapel at the DRC, we see places that are indeed worthy to called houses of God: full of venerable icons and relics, and which bright, clean, and well-kept.

Even more powerfully however, is the reality that when Christ humbled Himself to take on human flesh, He demonstrated once and for all that we human beings are made in God’s true image and likeness. Therefore, our Lord prefigures St. Paul’s statement about the need to maintain purity and holiness in the midst of the world, when He says, “Listen and understand: it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles” (Matthew 15:10-11). Though we cannot remove ourselves as easily from the influences of the world as the ancient Israelites could, we are still expected to maintain the same kind of holiness in our current society.

For if we take care to make sure that our spiritual communities are clean and safe, how much more should also make sure that we keep our bodies and spirits pure as well? As members of Christ’s Body, the most beautiful churches in the world only function when they are filled by Christians who walk in His ways.

+ALEXIOS
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