

## REFLECTIONS ON EPHESIANS 4: 12-16 (NKJV)

<sup>12</sup> for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, <sup>13</sup> till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; <sup>14</sup> that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, <sup>15</sup> but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— <sup>16</sup> from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

### Ephesians 4:12 – 13

Verse 12: for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ

#### REFLECTION:

The word St. Paul uses for equip is origin of the word “artisan” (in English) – an artist or a craftsman who works with his hands to make or build things. God is the artisan and He has provided the “saints” with His grace for the work of ministry. The goal of this ministry is to build up or increase the faith and morality of the faithful. The priest is one who has been gifted by God to shepherd the flock, nourish them with the word of God and protect them from false teaching. He is one who edifies the body of Christ. Some believe that the whole purpose of the laity is to receive the benefits of the priest’s ministry – preaching, counseling, comfort in times of trouble. But gifts of leadership are given so that those so gifted can equip all the believers for ministry. Each person is gifted by God in some way and is given by God to the Church for the edifying of the body. Many lay people are also given gifts of leadership and teaching. All leaders and teachers (Clergy and laity) should help and encourage all of the members of the body to discern what their gifts are and how best to use them, because the gift each person has been given cannot work for the building up of the Church unless the person who has been gifted gives – uses his/her gifts in works of service to others for the edifying of the body of Christ.

#### INFORMAL SUGGESTED REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. How are we equipped, as theologically educated women, to serve (minister) in the Church, in our parishes and in the world at large?
2. Reflect on the gifts and talents that you have been given. How have you used them to glorify God and edify the body of Christ?
3. Are there gifts or talents that you have not used for the building up of the body of Christ? Why not?

Verse 13: till we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

#### REFLECTION:

Our unity is not just a common knowledge or set of beliefs about the Son of God, but a common relationship. If our knowledge does not translate into a desire to follow Christ and encourage each other to do the same then it will do no good for ourselves or for the Church. Nothing expresses unity more than when each member in the body is working together, with the gifts God has given us, for the glorification of God through these gifts. As we live our lives for Christ we will find ourselves maturing and growing stronger, less prone to wander or be influenced by every new idea or belief. We want to become mature so that we may be useful to the Church. Though we will not attain perfection experientially in this world, we have a measure to look to on our journey – Christ Himself, a perfect man, is also the “stature of the fullness of God”. He is our standard; the measure of how we should be living to the glory of God. As we build each other up and encourage each other to become the servants Christ wants us to be, we come closer to the “stature of the fullness of Christ.”

#### INFORMAL SUGGESTED REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. How does a diversity of gifts create unity?
2. Life is a process of prioritizing – our time and schedules – so that we can “fit into our lives” what is important to us. Do I make using my gifts to help and encourage others a priority in my life? Are other things – job, family & friends, etc. higher up on my list of priorities?
3. Nobody on this earth is perfect except Christ. Do I use this as an excuse not to strive to grow in my service to Him? Do I use it as an excuse for being lazy?

## Ephesians 4:14

<sup>14</sup> that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting,

### REFLECTION #1:

As we read this verse, we see St. Paul warning us not to be willing to entertain every new thought and opinion that comes along. We must work to become grounded in, and sure of, what we believe so that we won't be "tossed to and fro", changing our beliefs each time we encounter a popular idea or a challenge to what we have been taught.

Paul is saying that the human being has a sort of predilection toward this wavering, and it must be guarded against. The world is only too full of confusing and false ideas, and people who want to propagate them. Paul uses the metaphor of sleight of hand--we can be easily fooled, if we are not grounded in our basic beliefs.

### INFORMAL SUGGESTED REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. Does Orthodox Christianity offer safeguards (sacramental, liturgical, or other) against the kind of unsteadiness that Paul warns against? If so, what are they?
2. How can we be builders of the unity in our faith that Paul says is necessary to withstand deception?
3. Paul uses several images in verses 12-16. Which do you find the most striking, and how would you present it to young people, especially teens?

### REFLECTION #2:

St. Paul concludes in Ephesians 4:14 that integrity and spiritual maturity develop when the body of Christ is true to its head and its mission. For him, these qualities are manifested when there is "unity in our faith and knowledge of the Son of God." If these cornerstones are in place, the body of Christ has a real defense against the countless teachings that distort the truth and lead to disunity, disintegration and death. When the body of Christ, the Church, possesses, reflects and strives for Unity and Knowledge, we shall, as St. Paul says, "no longer be children," or spiritual lightweights that blow in the wind, easily distracted and easily divided. Nor will we be "tossed about," like helpless prey, when confronted by specious reasoning and the seductive power of the world.

### INFORMAL SUGGESTED REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. What are the signs that a Christian community is seeking spiritual maturity? What are some of the situations/practices/customs that show spiritual health/spiritual disease?
2. In your experience, how are Orthodox Christians challenged to acquire a deeper understanding of their faith? Are there any signs that we have retreated from Christianity?
3. Does the parish community/seminary community provide a defense for its members against false teachings? What enables us to discern false teachings?

<sup>15</sup> but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— <sup>16</sup> from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

**REFLECTION:**

Verse 15: **but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ**

In this verse, "speaking the truth in love" literally means "to live the truth." So Paul is really talking about speaking and acting (authentically and not falsely) the truth in God's love (not a self serving love). Paul alludes to verbal testimony. The congregation is entrusted with the truth of His all-conquering love. Where there is no love, the truth revealed by God is denied – even sabotaged and it is our responsibility to be open to and act upon this. Equally, without truth there is no solid unity or community. The growth is to the Head who is Christ and not from the Head to the other members (we as members of the body grow up toward Christ, the Head of the body).

**INFORMAL SUGGESTED REFLECTION QUESTIONS:**

1. How has our Orthodox theological formation influenced us in this regard (to speak and act the truth in God's love)?
2. To bear testimony is to bear witness. This small verse makes a direct relationship with "living the truth" – martyria. Orthodox women graduates have their own varied, personal crosses to bear. On looking back over the years, what kind of testimony does your life demonstrate? How can we help one another in the presence of the Lord to go forward?
3. As our congregations today may not fare as well as those of the early church in bearing witness to this sacrificial, all-conquering love; how do we (in our own small way) become a help in this?
4. Here, equality, truth and community are interdependent. Perhaps it is sacrificial love that makes this all happen. How are we/can we become bearers of this?
5. In order to "find" our lives we "lose" our lives ("in Him we breathe and move and have our being"), as we lose our lives, we will find our lives in God who is all and in all. Growing toward the Head, points to an unconditional quality, pointing to our call to become full adopted sons and daughters of God. What one place can you start to improve – today – in order to strengthen this growth?

Verse 16: **from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love**

**REFLECTION:**

It is Christ, the Head, alone from whom we are "joined and knit together" to form One Body, and as members of His Body derive unity, nourishment and growth. Christ as "Head" (i.e. His monopoly and monarchy within the body), does not exclude (and thus cut us off from Life) but rather is creative. Through the activity of the Holy Spirit, He causes the growth and up-building of His Church. This is the activity of synergy between God and the people of God – acknowledging the source of our sustenance. Authentic growth cannot occur unless it comes from the Head and all members are working according to their individual/unique calling to build up the Body of Christ. All that the body is, has and does is determined by its relationship to the Head. This vertical relationship establishes a vigorous horizontal relationship among the other communities of His Church. This is not two-dimensional, as now, heaven and earth, even eternity is mysteriously "joined and knit together" to form an organic whole in Christ. We are quite literally "members of one another" as "one Christian is no Christian." No individual growth is mentioned here because each one's needs are addressed by Jesus' rulership – the Church is not treated by its Head as a collective of individuals, but everyone receives what he/she needs.

**INFORMAL SUGGESTED REFLECTION QUESTIONS:**

1. Growth caused also includes visible changes. Perhaps growth for the edification of the Body in love may point to a fundamental principle to help the Church discern the kind of growth that is healthy for itself. Name three challenges that impede or distract us personally or collectively from doing our share? How do we respond?
2. How could Christ be calling us (individually or collectively as alums) today regarding doing our share for the edifying of itself in love?
3. In this day and age, the temptation to individualism is especially powerful and dangerous. What are some of the most common personal and ecclesial traps we can fall into - that distracts us from trusting God and becoming better connected with our sisters and brothers?