

EPISTLE: 1 PETER

5



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PRACTICE QUIZ

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The Holy Apostle Peter talks a lot in his first epistle about humbly submitting ourselves to others: in the previous chapter he talked about submissive relationships within the family and among other Christians. In chapter five he talks about what has become a very controversial topic in the modern Church: the humility and submission required by and to leaders in the Church.

Look at how St. Peter describes himself: even though he was leader of the Twelve apostles, he nonetheless simply says he is “a fellow elder” among all those Christians to whom the glory of Christ will be revealed (5:1). He then describes the ways in which Christian leaders should think and act: they should willingly serve as leaders (rather than shying away from the problems inherent in leading, including being the first target during persecution); they should refrain from using their positions to accrue wealth and power; and they should serve as examples of humility and dedication to God (rather than “being lords over those entrusted to (them)”) (5:2-3). Venerable Bede summarizes St. Peter’s teaching like this, “Peter demonstrates in his own conduct the

kind of humility which he wants his flock to show toward him and toward each other. This is in line with what Jesus said: ‘But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.’”

Christian leaders are not the only ones who must be submissive, however – other Christians must submit to these leaders (and, such saints as Venerable Bede add, younger generations must honor older people) (5:5). In fact, the Apostle goes even further: “all of you must be submissive to one another” (5:5). St. Hilary of Arles explains how this works: “By ‘young men’ Peter means everyone who occupies a subordinate role in the Church. But note that those who are superiors must also act humbly, for humility is what should be common to both.” Ultimately, we must all humble ourselves before God – a benefit of this humility is that, by humbly depending upon Him for our well-being, we will know that we are being cared for by the God Who loves us (5:6-7).

It was important for the early Christians to remember this last point, because they suffered terrible persecution from Satan (5:8-9). Notice how St. Peter describes Satan: the devil is an “adversary” who “walks about like a roaring lion” (5:8) – in addition to showing Satan’s hostility to the Church, this also warns us to be constantly vigilant for his attacks, because a lion specifically directs its roars so that the prey does not know

the direction from which the attack will come. Christians must therefore continually resist the Devil’s attacks by being steadfast in the faith, continually relying upon the strength given us by God (who, Clement of Alexandria tells us, “is called the God of all grace because He is good and the giver of all good things”) (5:9-10). We can rely on God because He will strengthen and perfect us through this suffering (5:10).

St. Peter notes that he has written his epistle through Silvanus (5:12). Scholars believe Ss. Silvanus and Silas (see Acts 15:40) are the same person, but the Church traditionally makes a distinction between them (as can be seen in the troparion and kontakion for their feast day (July 30)). He also makes reference to Babylon, a woman and Mark in verse thirteen, which Orthodox teachers have traditionally understood, in the words of the monk Andreas, that “Peter calls Rome Babylon in a metaphorical sense. The woman who is chosen along with us is the church of Christ established in that city. He also mentions Mark the Evangelist, whom he calls his son in Christ and to whom he entrusted the task of writing the Gospel.”

Finally, in light of all he’s said, the Apostle wishes “peace to you all who are in Christ Jesus” (5:14).

LIFE TIP

St. Maximos the Confessor explains why God allows Satan to torment us: “Suffering cleanses the soul infected with the filth of sensual pleasure and detaches it completely from material things by showing it the penalty incurred as a result of its affection for them. This is why God in His justice allows the devil to afflict men with torments.”

