SUNDAY OF THE PUBLICAN AND PHARISEE

Now you have observed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith,
my patience, my love, my steadfastness.
2 Timothy 3: 10
(Epistle on the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee)

Depending on what kind of car you drive, every 3,000-5,000 miles you need to take it in for an oil change. I remember an OLD commercial where a car dealership advertised a 19-point inspection for $19. Yes, that had to have been a long time ago! I remember going to the car dealership and the mechanic looking at his checklist of the 19 points and telling me how my car checked out-a little low on brake fluid, tire pressure good, etc.

The period of the Triodion, which begins today, is a time for us to evaluate ourselves on a spiritual scale. Saint Paul, in his Epistle to Timothy, offers us a good "seven-point inspection" of our spiritual lives. So, as an exercise, take a few moments and evaluate yourself on these seven points. Perhaps even a scale of 1 to 10, rate how you are doing:

My teaching - what kind of Christian example are you setting for others? Whether you actively are "teaching" about Christ verbally, we all "teach" by example. What kind of example of Christianity are you modeling for your "students" - your spouse, children, friends, and anyone else you encounter on a regular basis?

My conduct - am I living my life according to the tenets of Christianity and the teachings of Christ?

My aim in life - Do I live with a sense of purpose? Is God the source and center of my life? Is my aim in life to please Him, or to please myself?

My faith - I'm now a year older than I was last year when we celebrated Pascha. Has my faith grown in the past year? Am I excited about my faith? Or stagnant?

My patience - this sin trips up most people on a daily basis. How is your patience on a daily basis? In control? Easily lost?

My love - Every commandment that God ever gave us comes under the umbrella of "love." Fear, anger, lust, sadness, all of these things are the antithesis of love. Joy, chastity, confidence and gratitude are all manifestations of love. Which set of words describes your life vest at present: fear, anger, blessed, and sadness, or joy, chastity, confidence, and gratitude?

My steadfastness - The journey of life, for most of us thankfully, is long. Along the way, we go through periods of joy and confidence. This is true for life in general and also for faith. There are times we feel we are getting ahead, other times when I feel like we are falling behind, and other times we are just standing still. IF YOU'RE READING THIS MESSAGE, give yourself at least a FIVE for steadfastness. Steadfastness is being in the game, showing up to play. It doesn't necessarily mean winning!

Going back to the example of the 19-point car inspection, once the inspection is complete, a diagnosis is made. Then the work is done to correct the problem. Finally, the car owner leaves happy that his or her car is in good working condition. Triodion, this period of preparation for Lent, is a period of inspection of our relationship with Christ, with our spiritual life. Lent is the period where we correct the problem, so that on Pascha, we can reclaim our full sense of joy, knowing that our hearts and souls are in good working condition.

Start evaluating, and the evaluation is not good, don't despair. That's why we have this period of time on our calendar each year, to repair and renew. The most important thing in any evaluation is honesty. So, make an honest evaluation of

yourself. Look at the end result of the process: a fully repaired you. Then start to tackle the work in between.

The Pharisee, who justified himself by boasting about his works, O Lord, You condemned; but You justified the Publican who was modest, and who with sighs prayed for expiation. For You do not accept boastful thoughts, but hearts that are contrite You do not despise. Therefore we, too, in humility fall down before You, who suffered for us. Grant us absolution and great mercy. Doxastikon from the Orthros of the Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee

Make an evaluation today!

Note: There is no fasting this week. Because the Pharisee boasted about his fasting, we abstain from fasting during the week following this Gospel reading.