the teaching of the faith. We rarely actually engage our will, substituting, instead, the passions of consumption. When I consider the reality of our lives, I think of St. Paul’s cry for help, “Who will deliver me from this body of death?” And I take comfort in the single moments. The story of the Old Woman and the Onion is a parable stated in the extreme manner of Absurdity. I was first drawn to it by the simple fact of its willingness to ascribe such mercy to God. A single, rotten onion, given as charity would be sufficient to get you out of hell! It was the imaginative force of such a thing that shook my soul when I first read it. In my childhood, there could never have been such a Christian mercy. Hell is hell is hell.

I have also had the unfortunate experience of meeting “Mrs. Grumbles,” or various versions of her. These are personalities that have almost disappeared behind a consuming passion or fixation (a memory, an injury). There is a deep sense that their freedom could come if for a moment they could set aside this besetting thing.

But I have seen, more than once, the favorable outcome of a soul whose deepest hunger has, in an unguarded moment, been exposed to the light of the gospel. I have often thought, “Give Him an inch and He’ll take your life!” But I have seen, more than once, the favorable outcome of a soul whose deepest hunger has, in an unguarded moment, been exposed to the light of the gospel. I have often thought, “Give Him an inch and He’ll take your life!”

Hunger has, in an unguarded moment, been exposed to the light of the gospel. I first read it. In my childhood, there could never have been such a Christian mercy. Hell is hell is hell.

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Today’s Hymns

Tone 6 Troparion (Resurrection)
The Angelic Powers were at Thy tomb; the guards became as dead men. Mary stood by Thy grave, seeking Thy most pure body. Thou didst capture hell not being tempted by it. Thou didst come to the Virgin, granting life! // O Lord, Who didst rise from the dead, glory to Thee.

Tone 4 Troparion (Ascension)
Thou hast ascended in glory, O Christ our God, granting joy to Thy Disciples by the promise of the Holy Spirit. Through the blessing they were assured,
that Thou art the Son of God;//
the Redeemer of the world!//
Tone 8 Troparion (Fathers)

Thou art most glorious, O Christ our God,
Who hast established the Holy Fathers as lights on the earth.
Through them Thou hast guided us to the true Faith.//
O greatly compassionate One, glory to Thee!//
Tone 8 Kontakion (Fathers)

The Apostles' preaching and the Fathers' doctrines have established one
Faith for the Church.
Adorned with the robe of truth, woven from heavenly theology,//
It defines and glorifies the great mystery of piety.
Tone 6 Kontakion (Ascension)

When Thou hadst fulfilled the dispensation for our sake and
united earth to heaven,
Thou didst ascend in glory, O Christ our God,
not being parted from those who love Thee,
but remaining with them and crying://
“I am with you, and there is no one against you!”
Tone 4 Prokeimenon (Song of the Three Children)

Blessed art Thou, O Lord God of our fathers, and praised and
glorified is Thy name forever! (Song of the three Holy Children, v. 3)
v: For Thou art just in all that Thou hast done for us! (v. 4)

Tone 1

Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!
v: The Lord, God of gods, speaks and summons the earth from the
rising of the sun to its setting. (Ps 49:50:1)
v: Gather to Me My venerable ones, who made a covenant with Me by
sacrifice! (Ps 49:50:5)

Today's Scripture Readings:
Acts 20:16-18, 28-36 (Epistle)
For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, so that he would not
have to spend time in Asia; for he was hurrying to be at Jerusalem,
if possible, on the Day of Pentecost. From Miletus he sent to
Ephesus and called for the elders of the church.
Acts 20:21-22 (Gospel)
if possible, on the Day of Pentecost. From Miletus he sent to
Ephesus and called for the elders of the church.
Acts 20:21-22 (Gospel)

A Single Moment
Grushenka, a character in Dostoevsky’s The Brothers Karamazov, relates
a now-famous fable about an old woman:
Once upon a time there was a woman, and she was wicked as wicked
could be, and she died. And not one good deed was left behind her.
The devils took her and threw her into the lake of fire. And her guardian angel
stood thinking: what good deed of hers can I remember to tell God? Then he remembered and said to God: once she pulled up an onion and
gave it to a beggar woman. And God answered: now take that same
onion, hold it out to her in the lake, let her take hold of it, and pull, and if
you pull her out of the lake, she can go to paradise, but if the onion
breaks, she can stay where she is. The angel ran to the woman and
held out the onion to her; here, woman, he said, take hold of it and I’ll pull.
And he began pulling carefully, and had almost pulled her all the way
out, when other sinners in the lake saw her being pulled out and all
began holding on to her so as to be pulled out with her. But the woman
was wicked as wicked could be, and she began to kick them with her
feet: ‘It’s me who’s getting pulled out, not you; it’s my onion, not yours. No
sooner did she say it than the onion broke. And the woman fell back
into the lake and is burning there to this day. And the angel wept and
shook his head. It reminds me of a small scene in CS Lewis’ The Great Divorce. Angels are
trying to help a soul make the journey from hell to heaven. One, a woman,
seems mostly to be a grumbler. Lewis’ soul has this conversation with his
own guide:
‘I am troubled, Sir,’ said I, ‘because that unhappy creature doesn’t seem
to me to be the sort of soul that ought to be even in danger of
damnation. She isn’t wicked: she’s only a silly, garrulous old woman who
has got into a habit of grumbling, and feels that a little kindness, and
rest, and change would dote her all right.’ ‘That is what she once was.
That is maybe what she still is. If so, she certainly will be cured. But
the whole question is whether she is now a grumbler.’ ‘I should have thought there was
not much about that!’ ‘Aye, but ye misunderstand me. The question is
whether she is a grumbler, or only a grumble. If there is a
real woman—even the least trace of one— still there inside
the grumbling, it can be brought to life again. If there’s one wee spark under
all those ashes, we’ll blow it till the whole pile is red and clear. But if
there’s nothing but ashes we’ll not go on blowing them in our own eyes
forever. They must be swept up.’
Both stories have in common a tiny, insignificant thing: an onion, a
grumble. There is in Scripture a similar “tiny thing,” a single moment that
serves as a hinge in a human life. The exchange between the “Good Thief”
and Jesus Christ on the Cross is hymned during Holy Week with the words: “The
Wise Thief entered Paradise in a single moment…” It is a remembrance of
the extreme measure of God’s grace. The human life can be terribly complicated. We rarely make decisions that
are straightforward. We are filled with contradictions. The gospel is
frequently presented as a matter of choice and decision, a very dangerous
categorization in a consumerist culture. We are the subjects of massive
propaganda and advertising, the goal of which is to guide our consumption,
not only of goods and services but of ideas and allegiances. In a world that
celebrates freedom, we are made the subjects of marketing so all-
pervasive that freedom itself is suppressed and distorted. Worse than this, I
think, is the fact that our culture nurtures the “character” of consumption
within the soul. We think and reason as consumers and “decide” in that