Facing the most difficult and unimaginable situations in life requires an incredibly deep and profound faith and hope in our Lord. Paul and Silas, with joy in their hearts, boldly preached the Lord. They were threatened, judged, humiliated, hated, beaten with rods, and locked up in prison. And what do they do after all this? With their feet in the stocks and the flesh on their backs bleeding from the many stripes that they received, they pray and sing hymns to God. I can’t help but take a step out of Church History and reflect for a moment on American history. I think about Martin Luther King, the Freedom Riders, and all the brave men, women, and children who faced the most brutal and horrific dangers which were no different than what Paul and Silas faced: threats, judgments, humiliations, beatings, imprisonment, and even horrible executions. Martin Luther King and his followers are famous for their non-violent and pacifist non-resistant protests. Every protest march and activity was preceded by a church service and prayer. These Civil Rights heroes exhibited a profound faith and hope in our Lord that I don’t even come close to. In spite of all the hypocrisies in American politics, they still proudly carried and waved the American flag in all of their protests. Birmingham, Alabama was no less dangerous for these oppressed and brave Christians than ancient Philippi, Rome or Jerusalem was for the brave Christians in the time of Paul and Silas. All is in God’s hands, yet the Lord must work with our evil and sinful ways. That is why things are not the way God intended them to be. Therefore, we must always trust in God, no matter how hard or difficult things may be for us to understand or accept. There is an earthquake, and all the fetters are opened and miraculously Paul, Silas and all the prisoners are released. Their jailer, trembling, asks Paul and Silas what he must do to be saved. That night he takes Paul and Silas home, washes and tends to their wounds, and he and his entire household are baptized. Although according to Church tradition Silas later becomes bishop of Corinth and lives to die in peace from natural causes, we know that ultimately St. Paul is imprisoned for the last time and beheaded, surrendering his soul as a martyr. Martin Luther King always suspected that one day someone would take his life, and according to his wife's autobiography, he was always trying to prepare her for this. In the Gospel we encounter a man born blind. The Jews who hated and judged our Lord had their physical sight but to nought and to their judgment and condemnation, because spiritually they were as blind as can be. The man born blind willingly and with spiritual strength endured and lived with his blindness. but in his heart he could see more clearly than the brightest day. As if recreating our fallen creation which had become blinded and full of suffering, Jesus makes clay out of His spittle and earth, anoints the man's eyes, and sends him to wash in the pool of Siloam. The man had the profound faith and hope that I spoke about, because without it, first of all, he would not have endured and lived with and accepted his blindness, and secondly, he would not have obeyed the Lord and with mud on his eyes, made a spectacle of himself as he groped and found his way in this humiliating manner to obey the Lord and wash in the pool of Siloam. Faith and humble obedience to the Word of the Lord. The blind man's eyes are opened, and not only spiritually, but now physically as well, he can see. The blind man did not even know who Jesus was, but he believed and had faith. When Jesus reveals to the formerly blind man that He is the Son of God, how does the man respond? He says, “Lord, I believe” and he worships Jesus. The man had a pure heart. Even in his responses when interrogated by the Pharisees, he exhibits no fear, but expresses himself with calmness, truthfulness and sincerity. Without hesitation he challenges the foolishness of the line of questioning of the Pharisees. A man born blind, looked down upon as an insignificant and ignorant beggar, expresses more wisdom and understanding than the educated and haughty Pharisees when he points out to them that if Jesus were not from God, then Jesus would not have been able to give him sight, a power of healing that is as rare as it is amazing in its scope and ability. “Never has it been heard since the world began that any one opened the eyes of a man born blind.” Purity of heart can give a person more wisdom than all the book learning in the world if it is done with pride and hypocrisy. So dear brothers and sisters, it is not social status, political power, or even the educated that should intimidate or cause us to
fear. St. John Chrysostom said that “Whoever has become a servant of the Lord fears only his Master. But whoever is without the fear of God is often afraid of his own shadow. Fearfulness is the daughter of unbelief. A proud soul is the slave of fear; hoping in itself, it comes to such a state that it is startled by a small noise, and is afraid of the dark.” Let us strive towards and cultivate the profound faith and hope in the Lord of Paul, Silas and the blind man. May the Light of Christ give true sight to us all. Amen.