

The Holy Forefathers

Today we celebrate the Holy Forefathers of Christ also known as the ancestors of Christ. Most of them were of the Hebrew race. If you look in today's bulletin, you'll see a list of them on the inside of the cover where I have copied the Synaxarion for today. They are: Adam the first Father; Enoch; Melchizedek; Abraham, the friend of God; Isaac, the fruit of the Promise; Jacob and the twelve patriarchs. We then commemorate those who lived under the Law: Moses, Aaron, Joshua, Samuel, David, and the Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel; the twelve minor prophets; Elijah, Elisha, Zachariah, and John the Baptist; and finally the Virgin Mary.

Just as among the Gentiles who are called, only the obedient were chosen for kinship with God, so the race of Israel, and Adam's descendants down to Israel's time, were a great multitude, but only those among them who lived according to God's will were true Israelites. To them the prophecies belonged. It is through them that future events were prefigured, and to them the promises were given (cf. Rom. 3:1-4:13). Only these people were the true ancestors of Christ.

They are commemorated by us today as partakers of the fullness of the saints. For, as St. Paul told us in today's epistle, in Christ Jesus there is neither old nor new, "Greek nor Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, or free man, but Christ is all, and in all" (Col. 3:11). In Christ, there is no Jew, which is one merely outwardly, neither is there any circumcision, which is outward, but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter of the law (Rom 2:28-29). All, old and new, who have been well-pleasing to God, and all who have led lives acceptable to God, either before the law, under the law or after the law in the gospel of grace, have this circumcision of the heart, and are united by it.

It is now the case that the elect from every nation receive a new name as Christians, but those who are fruitless are rejected, "many are called, but few are chosen", as the Lord Himself says (Matt. 20:16). And it was the same with those who lived in ancient times and those of the Jewish nation who came after them. Of those people who received new names, only the elect were accepted, whereas the mass of fruitless people among them were cast out.

The unprofitable majority among the Jews were not those who had converted to Judaism, but those who were born Jewish, and were even legitimate sons, after the flesh, of Jacob, the first to bear the name Israel, yet were disobedient like Esau. Even Absalom, the son of the Prophet and King David, was a stranger to the sacred race because he sought to kill his father.

In the same way, not all of us who are called after Christ, as they were after Israel, will be reckoned as belonging to the Christian race, (cf. 1 Pet 2:9) but only those who live according to His will, keep His commandments, and make up for their shortcomings with repentance. Judas Iscariot was not just one of those called, but one of the apostles, not merely one of the apostles, but one of the company of the twelve chief apostles. But he was estranged from kinship with Christ and became of all men the most alienated from the name of Christ. Why? Because he did not hasten towards the kingdom of heaven that was being proclaimed, nor did he regard the extraordinary deeds and teaching of the Savior. For when God's signs and works are understood, they lead those with the desire for knowledge of them to faith, and listening to holy instruction inspired by the truth that is in God reveals the way of life pleasing to God. With the help of both the miracles and teachings, we can learn to despise bodily and earthly concerns, and lift up our minds to the hope laid up in heaven. Judas, however, had no desires for these things, but look towards the earth and theft, earthly and detestable gains, into the advantages anticipated receiving from them for his flesh. He was a lover what had been forbidden on many occasions and in many ways by the Father, Lord and Teacher of all. His kinship was not with Christ, nor with his fellow apostles at the time but with those to whom the Lord had said, "You seek me, not because you saw the miracles, but because you ate of the loaves, and were filled" (John 6:26). Judas, after seeing the Lord's majesty and divinity with his own eyes, and having more experience of it and the others, handed Him over to those who sought to murder Him. But Christ was patient "unto death, even the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:8) and in addition to triumphing over the Prince of evil, he guides us towards patience and shows us that temptations and afflictions are for our good.

"In affliction we have remembered thee" (Isa. 26:16), says the Scriptures, and "I will bear the correction of the Lord" (Mic. 7:9), and "Thy correction hath lifted me up" (Ps. 8:35), that is to say, when I was bending down towards my body and its concerns, Your chastening raised me up and persuaded me to look towards You alone. If, however, you do not run to God in times of trouble, and are not raised up

by His correction's, what other occasion, what else in existence or among creatures will serve to restore you? You may say that our bodies must have physical nourishment and other necessities. But of course; who can deny that? If you have these things in abundance, you obviously received them from God - "for what has thou" asked the Scripture, "that thou didst not receive?" (1 Cor. 4:7) - so give thanks to the giver, express your gratitude through your actions. As He took your will into account and fulfilled your desire, so you too should draw near, heed His will, learn it thoroughly, obey it and put it into practice, that you may be praised for your wisdom: "Everyone therefore who hears My words and does them, I will compare to a wise person..." (Matt. 7:24) says the Lord. From then on you will have Him as your generous benefactor, not only in respect of earthly, perishable goods, but also with regard to future heavenly gifts that endure. "Well done", He says, "you good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a few things, I will set you over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord!" (Matt. 25:21) If, on the other hand, you do not have an abundance now of what your body needs, or fear that poverty lies ahead, again you should approach Him, again you should entreat Him, again you should obey Him. Because it says, "Obey the Lord and beseech him" (Ps. 37:7). Again, therefore show yourself a good servant of His through your deeds. For He it is, according to the Psalms, "Who gives them their food in due season. Who openeth his hand, and satisfieth the desire of every living thing" (cf. Ps. 145:15-16). He says, "I shall not fail thee, nor forsake thee" (cf. Deut. 31:6), and "Behold, my servants shall eat", but He tells those who do not serve Him, "You shall be hungry"(Isa. 65:13).

We must, "Seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." (Matt 6:33). If, however, we do not seek God's kingdom and righteousness as a priority, but only those things which sustain this unstable body, we will not receive even what we seek, unless it be for the increase of your body's suffering and eternal condemnation and the loss of our soul.

This is demonstrated by the rich man who heard Abraham telling him, "You, in your lifetime received good things" (Luke 16:25). Also, there was a time when the Jewish people wanted to eat meat in the wilderness, and God gave them quails in countless numbers (Num. 11:4, 31-33). "and they did eat, and were well filled: and he gave them their own desire. But while", it says, "their meat was yet in their mouths, the wrath of God came upon them and slew them in their masses, and bound the chosen men of Israel hand and foot" (Ps. 78:29 – 31). Why did God's

wrath strike them down "in their masses", that is, kill large numbers of the multitude? On account of the fact that they complained against God and Moses, their leader appointed by God, and spoke against them. But why did he bind the chosen men of Israel? Because they did not restrain the multitude as they sank from bad to worse. Such men were driven out of the sacred congregation and God's kingdom, whether they belonged to the Old or New people of Israel. The Lord, too, points this out, saying in the Gospels, "Many shall come from the east and the west and the north, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness" (cf. Matt. 8:11 – 12).

Who are those children in the kingdom expelled into darkness? Those who confess the faith, but deny God with their works, "being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate" (Titus 1:16). Who are those who sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the heavenly kingdom? Those who, with sincere faith, order their lives according to the law and teaching of the Spirit, and demonstrate their faith through their good works.

If anyone wishes to be classed with the latter, delivered from outer darkness, deemed worthy of the unfading light of God's kingdom and to live forever at rest with the saints in heaven, let him put to death what is earthly in themselves: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and foul talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another (Col 3:10). Seeing that you have put off the old nature with its practices and have put on the new nature, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of our Creator, in which is charity, brotherly love, purity, self-control in every type of virtue. Through these Christ dwells within us, reconciling us with Himself and one another.