

SERMON ON THE SUNDAY OF THE HOLY ANCESTORS OF THE LORD

(15/12/2019)

Christmas is coming! The hearts of all Christians are directed towards Bethlehem, as they prepare to receive the Savior: "*Christ from heaven is coming, welcome Him,*" as our Church urges us with its beautiful hymns. At the same time, the Church honors and celebrates today the glorious Ancestors of the Lord, from the Righteous Abraham up to the Blessed Virgin Mary, from whom Jesus Christ was born. Those who came before lived in complete obedience to God's will and firmly believed in His promises, such as Isaac who was to be sacrificed, Moses in the Exodus, the Prophet Daniel among the Lions, or the Three holy Youths in the furnace!

To appreciate the depth of their faith and obedience to God, one only has to compare it to the faith we find in our own day. How many modern Christians display a weak faith, which is even lost completely at the first temptation or serious hardship? When temptation comes, or illness, or great injustice, the cry goes out: Where is God? When a loved one is lost, you hear them say- "Why did this horrible thing happen to me? Where is God's Love, His Providence?" This is happening today, even though we have heard how much God loves mankind and gave His beloved Son to death for our salvation (see John 3:16). Christians lose their faith, even though they hold in their hands the Gospel, where we can read about the countless benefits Christ gives to the sick, the hungry and those suffering from injustice. How can such faithlessness exist, when we hear of the countless miracles that God does to ease our pain through the intercessions of our All Holy Mother and all the Saints!

Let us look at the first Ancestor, Abraham. He lived in a pagan environment, but maintained a pure soul and was searching for the true God. At some point he hears the voice of God say to him: "*Abram (his original name), get out of your country, from your kindred and from your father's house, to a land I will show you*" (Genesis 12:1). Was such a thing easy? Abraham would have to leave his comfortable surroundings and all he knew which was good, and go to an unknown land where he had no idea what to expect. And yet, since this was the command of God, he left his home and relatives and did what he was told, living in tents.

What strength of faith Abraham showed, for when he reached 99 years old, he believed in God's word that he would have a son, and that his offspring would be as many as the innumerable stars of heaven (Genesis 15:5)! He believed, and at the age of 100 had his son Isaac! Further, when God commanded him to sacrifice Isaac, who he had longed for and was his only son, he showed such obedience. He prepared everything to make this sacrifice (Genesis 22:1-13). Because of this, God rewards Abraham with the highest honor and promises that through his chosen offspring - the Messiah - all the nations of the earth will receive God's blessings (see Genesis 22:18). As always, Abraham believed the word of God and this promise was fulfilled. Forty-two generations had passed from Abraham's offspring to Nazareth's All Holy and Pure Virgin Mary. To further illustrate this point, St. Matthew the Evangelist begins his Gospel with the genealogy of Christ, from Abraham to the All Holy Virgin Mary, from whom Jesus Christ is born (see Matthew 1:1-16). This is for us to see and be assured that God fulfills His promises, even if it is not right away.

This is the second element that the Church emphasizes in today's Feast of the Holy Ancestors. While some of the promises of God seem unbelievable and impossible to the human mind, they are always fulfilled. "*For with God nothing will be impossible*" (Luke 1:37), was the Archangel Gabriel's assurance to the Blessed Virgin Mary, when she was given the joyous announcement that she was to be the Mother of the Son of God by the power of the Holy Spirit. Such a thing is unique in all of history!

My brothers and sisters, if Abraham and his descendants, who lived before Christ the Savior brought the Gospel to the world, lived obediently to the will of God, how can a baptized Orthodox Christian have doubt? Their sacrifices and devotion to faith in the true God should inspire us to accept God's will in our own lives. In every Divine Liturgy, we proclaim: "*We have seen the true Light; we have received the heavenly Spirit*", which illuminates and strengthens us in our spiritual struggle and in every occasion of our lives. "*We have found the true faith, the Apostolic Orthodox Faith!*"

May we receive and proclaim the Nativity of Christ with warm hearts of love and trust in Him, with a firm determination to live according to His will. In this way, we may enjoy the promise of His heavenly Kingdom. Amen.