

The Holy Fore-Fathers of Christ

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Glory to Jesus Christ!

Today, on this the second Sunday before Christmas, the Church presents us with the memory of the Holy Fore-fathers of Christ, those venerable and righteous ones of the Old Testament who served as historical links between the old man and the new, between the first Adam who fell from Paradise, and the New Adam, Jesus Christ, who restored us to His Kingdom.

Yet, these righteous ones of the Old Testament are put before us today as much more than mere historical witnesses to the fact that the same human nature which Adam and Eve had in the Garden of Eden was passed down to the Virgin Mary and her divine Child in the Cave in Bethlehem.

For these Holy Fore-fathers are placed before us today as examples, as people worthy of emulation and imitation, as people who sought and loved the Lord with their whole heart, their whole soul, their whole mind, and their whole strength.

When we look at their lives, we see three things.

First, we see in them a deep realization that they were in need of a Messiah. A realization that no matter how hard they tried, they could not keep the ways of God, they could not overcome their own sins, and they could not unite themselves to the Father, thereby overcoming death and the devil.

One brief look at their lives and we will see this.

Though the Fore-Fathers of Christ were as we say holy, they were not without sin. We know the first sin of Adam and Eve in Paradise. We know the struggles of the Prophet David, how he gave himself over to adultery and murder. And we know how the Prophets Moses, Jonah, and many of the others struggled with the call to serve the Lord.

And we see in their lives a humanity very much subject to the consequences of the fall – a humanity subject to the tyranny of the passions, death and the devil. But we also see in this fallen humanity a humility which looked for a Savior.

And this is the second characteristic of the Holy Fore-fathers which is worthy of emulation. In their humility they did not turn to despair but instead they turned to faith – faith in the God who had created them and faith in the God who one day would redeem them.

The Apostle Paul recounts the faith of these righteous men and women of the Old Testament in one of his most famous passages to the Hebrews. He writes,

“By faith Abraham, being tested, offered up Isaac. Moses by faith chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward.

By faith the Israelites passed through the Red Sea as by dry land, which the Egyptians attempting to do were drowned. By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they had been compassed seven days.

By faith [these ordinary men and women] subdued kingdoms, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. They were stoned, they were sawed in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented. Of whom the world was not worthy.”

And so we see the second characteristic – the presence of faith, a faith in the coming deliverance, a faith in the reward of a better resurrection, a faith in the coming of the Messiah.

And this faith brings us to the third way the Holy Fore-fathers are examples for us. First, they knew they needed a Messiah, and second, they had faith that the Lord God would deliver His people by sending a Messiah, and third, they prepared themselves for Him, they made themselves ready for His coming.

They sought to do everything in their power to reform their lives and open their minds and hearts to the ways of God, so that when He would send them their long awaited Messiah, they would be ready to receive Him with great rejoicing.

We remember how the Lord told the Jews that Abraham rejoiced to see His Day – that is that Abraham, and really all of the righteous men and women of the Old Testament, rejoiced to see the Incarnation of God the Word, the One who would save His people from their sins.

And so, brothers and sisters, as the Nativity Fast comes to a close, as their period of preparation for the coming of Christ, which the Fathers liken to the Old Testament, nears its end, we find ourselves sharing in the experience of the Holy Forefathers.

We have been humbled through fasting, self-examination, and spiritual struggle. We have arrived at a greater knowledge of our need for a Messiah, not only to free us from death and corruption, but also from our passions, bad habits, sinful attachments, and pride.

Yet, while we have grown in the awareness of our own spiritual futility, we have also grown in our assurance that our Savior has come, not only 2,000 years ago, but also that our Savior is continually coming to us, more and more each and every day: in every moment of heartfelt prayer, in every reception of Holy Communion, in every realization of our pride, in every struggle of self denial, and in every act of kindness and love.

And with this faith as our assurance, we continually prepare ourselves to receive Him more and more perfectly by making room for His love in our hearts, His wisdom in our minds, His words in our thoughts and conversations, and His ways in our actions and dealings with others.

And in this manner, we find ourselves becoming more and more united to Christ, more and more, as the Apostle Paul said in today's Epistle, renewed in the image of Him who made us.

The Lord comes to us in many ways and at many times. Let us continue to grow in our realization that we need Him as our Savior. Let us continue to look to Him in expectation of our victory over ourselves, the world, and the devil. And let us continue to prepare ourselves to more perfectly receive His presence into our lives.

In eight days, we will celebrate the coming of the Savior of the world, let us pass these final days of the Fast in expectation and preparation, for, as the Apostle Paul says, "When Christ our life appears, then we will also appear with Him in glory" – the glory of men and women transfigured by a life lived in Christ, the long-awaited Messiah, the Savior of the world.

To Him be the glory, together with His unoriginate Father, and His most-holy good and life-creating Spirit, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Glory to Jesus Christ!