

SERMON on the Sunday of the Holy Forefathers, December 16, 2018

The last two Sundays before the Nativity of Christ are called the Sunday of the Holy Forefathers and the Sunday of the Holy Fathers. They are the Old Testament relatives according to the flesh of our Savior, beginning with Adam and Eve, Abel, Seth, Enoch, Noah and his sons, the holy patriarch Abraham, and so on, up until our Savior Himself. In addition to our Lord's relatives, we remember all the righteous fathers and mothers of the Old Testament. For many thousands of years, since the ancestral sin of our forefather Adam and our foremother Eve, mankind has not been admitted into Paradise. The righteous of the Old Testament lived with the great hope in the coming of the Messiah, who would break the shackles of mankind which enslaved us to sin and to Satan, and once again open the doors Paradise to all who would repent of their sins and choose to love and follow God. The holy righteous ones that we remember today lived in a world that was drenched with debauchery and cruelty. It could be very easy faced with such overwhelming temptations around you to lose your way. Yet these holy mothers and fathers remained steadfast and true to their faith and the morality of God. They were shining bright lights in a sea of darkness. In the parable that our Savior tells us in the Gospel today, the powerful of the world reject Christ, they are full of excuses why they cannot come to the wedding feast of the King's son. If they truly wanted to go, they could go. Their excuses are only false pretenses which hide the true feelings in their hearts, which is that they have no desire to attend the wedding feast and no love, respect or care for the King or his son. Their only love is for themselves and for their carnal pleasures. Therefore, they refuse to attend the wedding feast. Notice, however, who responds to the invitation, and are triumphantly led to the wedding feast: the lame, the blind, the maimed and the halt. These are all the people who are sick with sin and weep and lament over their sins. These are the people who acknowledge their spiritual sicknesses and seek the Divine Physician who can heal them. The rich and the powerful who reject the invitation are also spiritually sick, but they live in denial and ignore or are blind to their sicknesses, and therefore have no understanding or desire to seek healing. The central liturgical theme of these Sundays is the story of the three holy youths who are the friends of the Prophet Daniel: Ananias, Azarius and Misael. The youths are thrown into a burning cauldron, a fiery furnace, because they would not bow down to the pagan idol. An angel of the Lord protects them, and in the midst of the flame they remain unharmed and offer up hymns and praise to God. This event is a prefiguring of the coming Nativity of our Lord. Just as the three youths were not harmed by the flames of the furnace, so also our Savior's birth did not scorch (did not harm) the "Virgin Womb," and in giving birth to our Savior, the Most Holy Mother of God preserved her virginity. Brothers and sisters in Christ, as we stand at the threshold of our Savior's Nativity, would the heavenly fire of faith and love for our Lord burn within our hearts. May we always acknowledge and repent for our sins, and may we remain steadfast and true to God and His commandments in the midst of the immorality and cruelty that surrounds us. May we be comforted with the fact that our Savior truly loves us and keeps His promises to us. Our Savior truly walks beside us through life. Our Savior truly converses with us in our hearts and in our souls and in our minds.

Through the prayers of our Holy Forefathers and Fathers and Mothers, may our Lord, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and save us! Amen.