



GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AUSTRALIA

PARISH OF THE ANNUNCIATION OF OUR LADY, “EVANGELISMOS”

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SUNDAY OF ORTHODOXY – FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT 20 MARCH 2016

During the 7th Century the “Iconoclasts” (image breakers) attempted to remove all icons from our Churches believing that icons should not be worshipped but only God. In 726AD Emperor Leo III issued an edict declaring all icons idols and ordered their destruction. The prohibition was based on God’s Second Commandment – “Thou shalt not have strange Gods before me.” So for over 150 years Orthodox Christians were banned from using icons in any manner, shape or form. The “Iconodules” buried icons to avoid their destruction during this period between 725-842AD. They were in favour of veneration of images and maintained that the honour given to an image was to the “prototype” and not to the image itself. Also we witnessed the image of God the Son in the Incarnation. The Seventh Ecumenical Council of Nicea in 787AD upheld the position of the Iconodules, condemned Iconoclasm as heretical and drew a distinction between “Latreia” (adoration) reserved for God alone, and “Proskynesis” (veneration) to be accorded to icons and relics. Thus it established in Orthodoxy the veneration of icons. Icons are the symbol of our faith in Christ. This is why this Sunday of the restoration of the icons in our Church is called “Sunday of Orthodoxy”. It is truly a victory for Orthodoxy which has withstood for 2000 years.

THE EPISTLE **The Reading is from St Paul’s letter to the Hebrews [Ch 11:24-26, 32-40]** **By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward. ...And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: who through**

faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, 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, turned to fight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn 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. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth. And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.

EXPLANATION: St Paul says that faith in Christ and the sacred mystery of the grace and energy of the Cross working within them enabled the saints to perform extraordinary powerful and courageous deeds. But faith without works is dead and works without faith are empty and useless. Christ commanded us to help the poor, to fast, to crucify ourselves together with our passions and desires. If therefore we eagerly do these things while at the same time believing God's promises to us are sure and true, then we shall have really believed God in the way Abraham, Moses and the saints did, and such faith brings salvation and we will be counted among the righteous. The world that does not know God, rejects those who put their trust in Him and who live their lives in accordance with His will. The sufferings of the blessed prophets provided the model for the divine apostles who travelled preaching all over the world, without home, bed, board or any of the necessities of life, and were scourged, racked, imprisoned and underwent countless kinds of death. The faith of all those prophets and martyrs is testified to in the Scriptures. The promise that was the object of their faith was Christ, and they all died in the hope of its fulfilment. God's plan involved the salvation of the whole human race, and the Hebrew faithful had to wait for God's

Coming to call all men to Himself. They were the forerunners, the ones chosen to prepare the way. His **“better thing”** was the New Covenant **(11:40)**, which those who were living at the Apostles’ time had the privilege of seeing established. The Old Testament saints could not have had their hope completed (**“should not be made perfect”**)(**11:40**) without the participation of those who put their faith in the Incarnate Word, in Him Who is the One promised, prophesied and prefigured in the Old Testament. The New Covenant brings forth the perfecting of God’s people – the full revelation of God in His Son, His Perfect Covenant to replace the Old, and His perfect sacrifice on the Cross for the salvation of all who love Him.

THE GOSPEL **The Reading is from the Gospel of St John [Ch1:43-51]** The following day Jesus wanted to go to Galilee, and He found Philip and said to him, **“Follow Me.”** Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, **“We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote – Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”** And Nathanael said to him, **“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”** Philip said to him, **“Come and see.”** Jesus and Nathanael said to him, **“How do You know me?”** Jesus answered and said to him, **“Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.”** Nathanael answered and said to him, **“Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!”** Jesus answered and said to him, **“Because I said to you, ‘I saw you under the fig tree,’ do you believe? You will see greater things than these.”** And He said to him, **“Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”**

EXPLANATION: Philip said to Nathanael, if you have any doubt that Jesus of Nazareth is the true Messiah, **“Come and see, see for yourself.” (1:46)** It was not so much that Jesus had seen Nathanael under the fig tree before Philip called him that surprised Nathanael; it was that Jesus had read the innermost thoughts of his heart. So Nathanael said to himself, **“Here is a man who understands my dreams, my prayers and has seen into my most secret longings. This must be the Son of God, none other than the promised Messiah.”**

God is He Who sees everything. We all live in the sight of God. He sees our afflictions and cares for us. The eyes of God are the eyes of tender love and mercy. He sees us not because He wants to punish us, but because He loves us. In fact, He loves us so much that He cannot take His eyes off us. He sees us in our suffering and pain, even in our sinful state, and hastens to comfort and to help us by His grace, summoning us to repentance. His eyes are full of tears of compassion for the sinful state of the world. Just as He wept for Jerusalem and before the tomb of his friend Lazarus, He weeps for the sins of the world, waiting patiently outside for man to open the door of his heart and to let Him in. He will not interfere as He does not want to violate man's freedom. **(1:43-49)** Jesus did not say Nathanael was without sin. He said he was "**without guile**", without deceit – which implies a pure heart capable of recognizing Christ. **(1:47)** Jesus would not have Nathanael's faith stop there. His ministry has not yet begun. There will come a time when Nathanael will see many miracles. Does Nathanael believe so easily, just because Jesus said to him that He saw him under the fig tree? Can a mere word produce such faith? Jesus says, "**You will see greater things than these.**" **(1:50)** Jesus subsequently discloses what is the greater things of which he speaks of apart from the miracles. That is, Nathanael will be a witness to Christ's divinity; that the Son of Man is both man and God, surrounded by all the heavenly powers, "**ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.**" "Son of Man" refers to Christ's humanity, as opposed to His divinity. The original sin of Adam and Eve separated man from God. By His incarnation and death on the Cross, Christ reunited man with God. His Cross, set up on earth like Jacob's Ladder reaches into heaven. Christ is the ladder or bridge between earth and heaven. Through His resurrection, ascension, and exaltation to the right hand of God, human nature is raised to heaven. And through His Second Coming, all things will be reconciled to God. In Christ, heaven and earth are joined. **(1:51)**