



## GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AUSTRALIA

### PARISH OF THE ANNUNCIATION OF OUR LADY, “EVANGELISMOS”

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### SUNDAY 23 JUNE 2019 – FEAST DAY OF ALL SAINTS

The Sunday after Pentecost Sunday is called the Feast Day of All Saints. Every day in the Church calendar has a list of Saints, some famous and great, and some not so famous. Some we know more about and have become more popular than others. Each man, woman and child in the history of the Church who witnessed for Christ is regarded a Saint by the Orthodox Church.

**EPISTLE** The Reading is from St Paul’s Letter to the Hebrews [11:33-40, 12:1-2]

**...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 flight 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 mocking 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. Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before**

**us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.**

**EXPLANATION:**

Here St Paul lists the achievements of great men of faith who exhorted the people to repentance and governed the nation with equity and justice. For example, Samuel **“judged Israel all the days of his life”**; (11:33) and Daniel, who by faith was delivered from the **“mouths of lions”** (11:33); and the three youths who, through their faith came out of the fiery furnace unharmed (**“quenched the violence of fire”**). Many received strength even at moments of great weakness. David **“waxed valiant”** by becoming strong in war and many put enemies of the people of God to flight because of their faith. (11:34) It was by faith that Elijah raised the son of the widow from Sarepta from the dead and Elisha accomplished the same in the case of the Shunammite woman’s son (that is, **“women received their dead raised to life again”**). Many were tortured because of their faith and heroes such as St John the Baptist and the Apostles chose to die, even though some had raised others in order **“that they may obtain a better resurrection”**. That is, they were offered freedom for denying their faith in God, but they refused to **“accept deliverance”** (freedom) because they wanted greater union with Christ (**“better resurrection”**). (33:35) **tormented** because they would not renounce their love for Christ. (33:36-37) **“They wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth”**. That is, they travelled all over the world preaching the Word of God without home, bed, shelter and necessities of life to a society that often rejected them. (33:38) St Paul then sums up the whole argument of this chapter. The **“promise”** that was the object of the Old Testament saints’ faith was Christ, and they all died in the hope of its fulfilment. But they did not receive the promise because they did not witness Christ’s Incarnation. They were forerunners, the ones chosen to prepare the way for Christ’s coming to call all men to Himself. His **“better thing”** was the New Covenant, 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”**) 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. **(33:39-40)** 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. Since we are **"surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses"** (that is, Saints and martyrs), we are required to follow their example and take courage and inspiration from their faithfulness, and **"run the race"** (that is, life-long Christian struggle) with patience and endurance. We should **"lay aside every weight"**, that is, anything that could be a hindrance to our spiritual progress and always keep Christ in our mind and heart for without Him we cannot finish the race of faith which leads to salvation. **(12:1)** Jesus is the **"author and finisher of our faith"**. That is, He is the originator of the plan of salvation and through His voluntary suffering, death and resurrection He has finished, completed and perfected His work of redemption. The **"joy that was set before Him"**, is the joy in completing His work – the redemption and deification of human nature which He takes with Him into the heavenly realm – **"the right hand of God"**, a place He always occupied. **(12:2)**

**GOSPEL** **The Reading is from the Gospel of Matthew [10:32-33, 37-38, 19:27-30]**

**Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven....He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me....Then Peter answered and said to Him, "See, we have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we have?" So Jesus said to them, "Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who**

**have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first."**

### **EXPLANATION:**

Jesus exhorts His disciples to bear witness even unto martyrdom. For belief only within one's soul does not suffice. **"For he that confesses in Me"**, that is, my strength, does so with the aid of grace from above. But whoever shall **deny Me** does so because he does not have aid from above. So if you confess that Christ is God, then Christ will confess to His Father that you are a true servant. But those who deny will hear the words **"I do not know you"**. **(10:32-33)** And he who loves his parents more than Christ is not worthy of Him. **(10:37)** And whosoever does not renounce this present life and give himself over to shameful death (ie. crucifixion) is not worthy of Me. To carry his cross to the end, a true disciple must be ready, if absolutely necessary to sacrifice, not only family relationships, but also his own life for Christ. For even natural affection for one's family becomes a passion when it is placed before love of God. These passions war against the poor as well as the rich. **(10:38)** Peter had not forsaken very much as he was poor, but he believed he had forsaken much because the fewer the possessions men have, the greater the attachment. **(19:27)** Jesus does not need to sit on a throne because He is everywhere, but He indicated by means of a throne the grace that will be bestowed on those who follow Him to the end. But if they should change and become unworthy as Judas did, those good things are denied. The **"regeneration"** means those who are with Him at the Resurrection of the dead and the Last Judgment. **(19:28)** So that no one would think that what was said applied only to the disciples, Christ broadened the promise to include everyone who does likewise. The Lord does not bid us to separate from our families, but only when they impede our piety. In the same manner, He bids us to despise even our own life and body if they cause us to sin – but not to commit suicide. **(19:29)** **"But many that are first shall be last, and the last shall be first"** – that is, Christ is referring to the Jews who were first to receive the Word and rejected it, whilst the Gentiles, who were last, were put first because they embraced Jesus as the Christ.