

TAKING UP ONE’S CROSS
And the Will of God
A GREAT CLOUD OF WITNESSES

June 7, 2015
Sunday of All Saints
Revision G

GOSPEL: Matthew 10:32-33, 37-38; 19:27-30
EPISTLE: Hebrews 11:33-12:2

The Sunday of All Saints was first celebrated in Antioch during the 4th Century and was initially a Feast of all the martyrs. Other Saints were gradually added to make this Sunday what it is today.

In the West, today is called Trinity Sunday. In the East, Pentecost itself is called Trinity Sunday and today is the First Sunday after Pentecost (or the First Sunday after Trinity) and is also known as the Sunday of All Saints. In the West, All Saints Day is in November, right after All Hallows Even (or Halloween). This Gospel lesson is also found in Luke 12:8-9; 14:26-27; 22:28-30, and portions of Matthew’s and Luke’s accounts are used many times in the Eastern Sunday Lectionary, especially in June, July, September and during Lent.

Today’s Epistle lesson speaks of Old Testament Saints who left everything to follow the Word of God. The gory details from Hebrews 11 illustrating the original theme of the Feast Day of all the Martyrs are not used in the West, but the resulting exhortation from Hebrews 12 is used either during Lent or in August. Most of today’s Epistle lesson is also used in the Eastern Lectionary for the First Sunday in Lent.

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Old Testament Prophecy:

The Old Testament readings for the Vespers preceding the Sunday of All Saints illustrate the theme of the martyrs of the Faith. These are summarized as follows:

Isaiah 43:9-14: The Lord's Witnesses

The context is "My Servant" (Isaiah 42:1) who will "establish justice in the earth" (Isaiah 42:4), and refers to Christ. Israel will be appointed "as a covenant to the people, as a light to the Gentiles" (Isaiah 42:6), "to open blind eyes, to bring prisoners from the dungeon and those who dwell in darkness from the prison" (Isaiah 42:7). Israel will be redeemed and called by the Lord's name (Isaiah 43:1) and their offspring gathered from the ends of the earth (Isaiah 43:5-7). Those gathered are referred to as the Lord's "witnesses" (Isaiah 43:10, 12) and they "will declare My praise" (Isaiah 43:21). There was no strange god among them, and they know that "even from eternity I AM" (Isaiah 43:12).

The Witnesses: By "witnesses" (Isaiah 43:10, 12), the word used in the Greek Septuagint¹ is *martus*, which is the same word used for the martyrs in the New Testament. It can mean both "witness" (2 Corinthians 13:1) and martyr (Revelation 17:6). In both cases, their "witness" was their testimony in standing firm for the Faith, even to the point of death.

Justin Martyr, speaking to the Jewish philosopher Trypho, stated² that God gave the sun and the heavenly bodies to the Gentiles as an object of worship to lead them to Christ, which they did. In this fashion, Christ is "witness" to those who have believed.

"David, speaking about Christ, said no longer that 'in His seed' the nations should be blessed, but 'in Him'. So it is here! 'His name shall rise up forever above the sun; and in Him shall all nations be blessed' (Psalm 72:17 LXX). But if all nations are blessed in Christ, and we of all nations believe in Him, then He is indeed the Christ, and we are those blessed by Him. God formerly gave the sun as an object of worship (Deuteronomy 4:19 LXX), but no one ever was seen to endure death on account of his faith in the sun. But for the Name of Jesus you may see men of every nation who have endured all suffering, rather than deny Him. For the word of His truth and wisdom is more light-giving than the rays of the sun, and sinks down into the depths of heart and mind".

"To us, therefore, it has been granted to hear, and to understand, and to be saved by this Christ, and to recognize all the truth revealed by the Father. Wherefore He said to Him: 'It is a great thing for You to be called My Servant, to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and turn again the dispersed of Israel. I have appointed You for a light to the Gentiles, that You may be their salvation to the end of the earth'" (Isaiah 49:6).

"You may think that these words refer to the stranger and the proselytes, but in fact they refer to us who have been illumined by Jesus. For Christ would have borne witness even to them; but now you have become twice as much the

¹ The Greek Septuagint, or LXX, is a translation of the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek that was done in the 2nd and 3rd Century BC. It was the LXX that was used exclusively by the Church, and most of the Old Testament quotes in the New Testament come word-for-word from the LXX.

² Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho, 121-122.

children of hell, as He said Himself (Matthew 23:15). Therefore what the prophets wrote was spoken not of strangers and proselytes, but of us, concerning whom the Scripture speaks. 'I will lead the blind by a way which they knew not; and they shall walk in paths which they have not known. And I am witness, says the Lord God, and My Servant whom I have chosen' (Isaiah 42:16, 43:10). To whom, then, does Christ bear witness? Clearly to those who have believed! But the proselytes not only are unbelievers, but blaspheme His Name twice as much as yourselves, and wish to torture and put to death us who believe in Him; for in all points they strive to be like you. Again in other words He cries, 'I the Lord have called You in righteousness, and will hold Your hand, and will strengthen You, and will give You for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles, to open the eyes of the blind, to bring out the prisoners from their bonds' (Isaiah 42:6-7). These words refer also to Christ, and concern the enlightened nations".

Before Me There Was No Other God: Many of the Church Fathers quoted Isaiah 43 to address Christology; that is, the issues relating to the person of Christ. Isaiah testifies that the Son is equal to the Father in His Deity, which is not what the heretics and the Greek philosophers taught. Following is a summary of some of these comments.

John Chrysostom stated³ the Greek philosophers speculated that there were some gods older than others, but that this is not part of Christianity. If the Son is younger than the Father, He is a created being and is not of the same Essence as the Father.

"I know that many cannot comprehend what has been said. 'For the thoughts of mortal men are miserable, and our devices are but uncertain' (Wisdom 9:14 LXX). Still I should like to ask our objectors, what does the Prophet mean, 'Before Me there was no God formed, nor is there any after Me' (Isaiah 43:10). If the Son is younger than the Father, how does the Father say, 'Nor is there any after me?' Will you take away the being of the Only-Begotten Himself? You either must dare to do this, or admit one Godhead with distinct Persons of the Father and Son.

Finally, how could the expression, 'All things were made by Him' (Colossians 1:16), referring to the Son, be true? For if there is an age older than He, how could He have made that which was before Him? Do you see to what daring the argument has carried them? Why didn't the Evangelist say that Christ was made from nothing, as Paul declares of all things, when he says, 'Who calls those things which are not as though they were' (Romans 4:17); but says, 'Was in the beginning?' (John 1:1-2) For God neither is made, nor has anything older than Himself; it is the words of the Greeks that say otherwise.

Would you not say that the Creator, beyond all comparison, excels His works? What is the meaning of the expression, 'I am the first and I am the last' (Isaiah 44:6); and, 'before Me was no other God formed?' (Isaiah 43:10) For if the Son is not of the same Essence, there is another God; if He is not Co-eternal, He is younger than the Father; and if He did not proceed from the Father's Essence, it is clear that He was made.

³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, IV, 2.

Moreover, if He is not Co-eternal with the Father, how can you say that His Life is infinite? For if it has a beginning from before, although it is endless, yet it is not infinite; for the infinite must be infinite in both directions. Paul declared this when he said, ‘Having neither beginning of days, nor end of life’ (Hebrews 7:3); by this expression he showed that He is both without beginning and without end. As the one has no limit, so neither has the other. In one direction there is no end, in the other, no beginning”.

Ambrose stated⁴ that Isaiah presents a dilemma for those who do not believe in the Trinity. If one says that Isaiah refers to the Son, no god comes before Him; if Isaiah refers to the Father, no god comes after Him. The only solution is that the Father and Son are co-eternal.

“It is plain that the Son is like the Father, and so we may confess that He is also eternal, seeing that He, Who is like the Eternal, must be eternal. But if we say that the Father is eternal, and yet deny this of the Son, we say that the Son is unlike the Father, for the temporal differs from the eternal. The Prophet proclaims Him eternal, and the Apostle proclaims Him eternal; the Testaments, Old and New alike, are full of witness to the Son’s eternity.

Let us take them in their order. In the Old Testament it is written, ‘Before Me has there been no other God, and after Me shall there be none’ (Isaiah 43:10). I will ask you straight, ‘Who speaks these words, the Father or the Son?’ Whichever of the two you say, you will find yourself convinced, or, if a believer, instructed. If it is the Son speaking, He says, ‘Before Me has there been no other God’; if it is the Father speaking, He says, ‘After Me shall there be none’ (Isaiah 43:10). The One has none before Him, the Other none that comes after. As the Father is known in the Son, so also is the Son known in the Father. Whenever you speak of the Father, you speak also by implication of His Son, seeing that none is his own father; and when you name the Son, you also acknowledge His Father, inasmuch as none can be his own son. The Son cannot exist without the Father, nor can the Father without the Son. The Father, therefore, is eternal, and the Son also is eternal.

‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God’ (John 1:1). Where did the blasphemer find it written that He ‘was not’? Again, John speaks of ‘That which was in the beginning’ (John 1:2). The extension of the “was” is infinite. Conceive any length of time you will, yet still the Son ‘was’”.

Wisdom 3:1-9: The Martyrs Kept the Faith

The Book of Wisdom is part of the Old Testament Apocrypha and was written between Malachi (5th Century BC) and the translation of the Septuagint (3rd Century BC) and was included in the Septuagint as part of the Scriptures by the translators. While English-speaking people have largely ignored the Apocrypha, it was widely quoted by the early Church Fathers. The text from the Septuagint is as follows:

“But the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and there shall no torment touch them. In the sight of the unwise they seemed to die; and their departure is taken

⁴ Ambrose of Milan, Exposition of the Christian Faith, I, viii, 54-56.

for misery, and their going from us to be utter destruction: but they are in peace. For though they were punished in the sight of men, yet is their hope full of immortality”.

“And having been a little chastised, they shall be greatly rewarded: for God proved them, and found them worthy of Himself. As gold in the furnace hath He tried them and received them as a burnt offering”.

“And in the time of their visitation they shall shine, and run to and fro like sparks among the stubble. They shall judge the nations, and have dominion over the people, and their Lord shall reign forever. They that put their trust in Him shall understand the truth; and such as are faithful in love shall abide with Him; for grace and mercy is to His saints, and He has care for His elect” (Wisdom 3:1-9 LXX).

As one can see, this passage also addresses the martyrs and contains some of the same themes found in the New Testament⁵. When Jesus and the Twelve began teaching these things, it wasn't some strange and new concept but was well known to any who studied the Scriptures.

Thus the martyrs not only “kept the Faith” in their persecutions, but they did so by knowing the Lord intimately. In some cases, the persecution involved martyrdom; in other cases it involved flight from the enemies of God. Athanasius of Alexandria noted⁶ a number of cases where the saints fled from the persecution of their enemies. For example: the Prophet Elijah from Jezebel (1 Kings 19:1-3), the Prophet Micaiah from Ahab (1 Kings 22:5-8), the unnamed prophet who rebuked Jeroboam (1 Kings 13:1-10), and Paul when he appealed to Caesar (Acts 25:10-12). Also Jacob fled from Esau (Genesis 27:41-43), Moses fled from Pharaoh (Exodus 2:11-15), David fled from Saul (1 Samuel 19:8-18), and Paul fled from Damascus (2 Corinthians 11:32-33). All this was part of their purification like gold in a furnace.

“These things both prove that their previous flight was not the effect of cowardice; and testify that their later conduct also was of no ordinary character. They loudly proclaim that they possessed in a high degree the virtue of fortitude. For neither did they withdraw themselves on account of a slothful timidity; on the contrary, they were at such times under the practice of a more severe discipline than others. Nor were they condemned for their flight, or charged with cowardice, by the kind of people who are now so fond of blaming others. Instead they were blessed through that declaration of our Lord, ‘Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sakes’ (Matthew 5:10). Their sufferings were profitable to themselves; for having tried them as ‘gold in the furnace’ (Wisdom 3:5-6 LXX), God found them worthy of Himself. They shone the more ‘like sparks,’ being saved from those that persecuted them, delivered from the designs of their enemies, and preserved to the end that they might teach the people. Their flight and escape from the rage of those that sought after them, was according to the dispensation of the Lord. They became dear in the sight of God, and had the most glorious testimony to their fortitude”.

⁵ Compare, for example, the Gospel lesson Matthew 19:28-30; also 2 Corinthians 4:7-12, 1 Corinthians 3:10-15, John 8:31-32.

⁶ Athanasius of Alexandria, Defense of His Flight, 16-20.

Cyprian of Carthage, writing from exile, encouraged⁷ the Christians to follow the example of some of the recent martyrs from their midst. He quotes the Wisdom of Solomon as “Scripture” that we are merely following the example of our Lord if we are persecuted and martyred.

“The Holy Spirit has animated you to the endurance of suffering. Let no one think of death, but of immortality; nor of temporary punishment, but of eternal glory. ‘Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints’ (Psalm 116:15); and again, ‘A broken spirit is a sacrifice to God: a contrite and humble heart God does not despise’ (Psalm 51:17). And again, the sacred Scripture speaks of the tortures, which consecrate God’s martyrs, and sanctifies them in the trial of suffering. ‘And if they have suffered torments in the sight of men, yet is their hope full of immortality; and having been a little chastised, they shall be greatly rewarded; for God proved them, and found them worthy of Himself. As gold in the furnace He has tried them, and received them as a sacrifice of a burnt-offering, and in due time they shall shine. The righteous shall shine, and shall run to and fro like sparks among the stubble. They shall judge the nations, and have dominion over the people; and their Lord shall reign forever’ (Wisdom 3:4-8 LXX). When, therefore, you reflect that you shall judge and reign with Christ the Lord, you should rejoice and tread under foot present sufferings, in the joy of what is to come. Know that from the beginning of the world it has been so appointed that righteousness should suffer in the conflict of the world, since in the beginning, even at the first, the righteous Abel was slain, and thereafter all righteous men, prophets and apostles, who were sent. The Lord in Himself has appointed an example by His own life, teaching that none shall attain to His kingdom but those who have followed Him in His own way. ‘He that loves his life in this world shall lose it; and he that hates his life in this world shall keep it to life eternal’ (John 12:25). And again, ‘Fear not those who kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell’ (Matthew 10:28). Paul also exhorts us that we who desire to attain to the Lord’s promises ought to imitate the Lord in all things. ‘We are the sons of God; but if sons, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together’ (Romans 8:16-17). Moreover, he added the comparison of the present time and of the future glory, saying, ‘The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the coming glory which shall be revealed in us’ (Romans 8:18). When we consider the glory and the brightness, it behooves us to bear all afflictions and persecutions; many are the afflictions of the righteous, yet those are delivered from them all who trust in God”.

John Chrysostom compared⁸ people who persecute Christians to people in this life who don’t know whom they are dealing with. It’s like a wealthy and powerful man in a foreign country, where the servants there don’t have any idea who he is. If they insulted him in ignorance, he would be inclined to laugh at them, knowing that they would be embarrassed and

⁷ Cyprian of Carthage, Epistles, LXXX, 2.

⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXXIX, 3.

afraid for their life if they realized who he was. As Christ said at His Crucifixion, “Father forgive them, for they don’t know what they’re doing!”

“Let us run to immortality; let us follow our King; let us too set up a trophy; let us despise the world’s pleasures. We need no work to do so; let us transfer our souls to heaven, and the entire world will be conquered. Strangers we are; let us then not grieve at any of its painful things. Suppose you had grown up in a renowned country, and had gone into some distant land, being known to no one, having with you neither servants nor wealth. If then someone had insulted you there, you wouldn’t grieve as though you had suffered these things at home. Knowing that you were in a strange land, would persuade you to bear all easily, and to despise hunger, and thirst, and any suffering whatever. Consider now, that you are a stranger and a traveler, and let nothing disturb you in this foreign land. You have a City whose Founder and Creator is God, and your stay is but for a short time. If a man were to insult the governor, knowing that he is governor, then the insult is serious; but if he insults him, supposing him to be a servant, he cannot even touch him who undergoes the insult. So let us reason also. Our revilers do not know who we are, that we are citizens of heaven, registered for the country which is above, fellow-choristers of the Cherubim. Let us not deem their insult to be insult; had they known, they would not have insulted us. If a traveler were to get ahead of his servants, and was sitting down a while waiting for them, and then the innkeeper, behaved rudely to him, and reviled him, would he not laugh at the other’s ignorance? Would he not feel as though not he but someone else were insulted? Let us too behave thus. We too sit in an inn, waiting for our friends who travel the same road; when we are all gathered, then they shall know who it was that they insulted. These men then shall hang their heads; then they shall say, ‘This is he whom we fools held in derision’” (Wisdom 5:3 LXX)

Wisdom 5:15-6:3: The Reward for the Martyrs

This passage addresses the martyrs from the viewpoint of their reward when the Lord returns, and also from the viewpoint of the vengeance on their persecutors when the Lord returns. Following is the text from the Septuagint:

“But the righteous live forevermore; their reward also is with the Lord, and the care of them is with the most High. Therefore shall they receive a glorious kingdom, and a beautiful crown from the Lord’s hand; for with His right hand shall He cover them, and with His arm shall He protect them”.

“He shall take to Him His jealousy for complete armor, and make the creature His weapon for the revenge of His enemies. He shall put on righteousness as a breastplate, and true judgment instead of a helmet. He shall take holiness for an invincible shield. His severe wrath shall He sharpen for a sword, and the world shall fight with Him against the unwise”.

“Then shall the right aiming thunderbolts go abroad; and from the clouds, as from a well drawn bow, shall they fly to the mark. And hailstones full of wrath shall be cast as out of a stone bow, and the water of the sea shall rage against them, and the floods shall cruelly drown them”.

“Yea, a mighty wind shall stand up against them, and like a storm shall blow them away: thus iniquity shall lay waste the whole earth, and ill dealing shall overthrow the thrones of the mighty”.

“Hear therefore, O ye kings, and understand; learn, ye that be judges of the ends of the earth. Give ear, ye that rule the people, and glory in the multitude of nations. For power is given you of the Lord, and sovereignty from the Highest, who shall try your works, and search out your counsels” (Wisdom 5:15-6:3 LXX).

Paul was not the first one to speak of the full armor of God (Ephesians 6:13-17). Other similar themes are sounded as is found in the New Testament⁹. The writings from the Book of Wisdom reflect the expectation of the righteous Jews of the 1st Century for the Kingdom of God and include some of the prophecy found in both Old and New Testament.

⁹ Compare, for example, Revelation 22:5; 2 Timothy 4:8; 1 Corinthians 9:25; Revelation 16:17-21.

Gospel: Matthew 10:32-33, 37-38; 19:27-30

The common theme in each of the three excerpts of the Gospel lesson is one of leaving all to follow the Lord, as the martyrs did, confessing Him before men and taking up one's cross in the process. The taking up of one's cross is addressed at two other times during the Orthodox Church Year: on the 3rd Sunday of Lent called "The Adoration of the Cross" and in September with "The Exaltation of the Cross" and the Sundays before and after. Thus four Sundays and one Special Feast Day deal with the implications of the Cross in the Orthodox lectionary. Today the focus is on all the saints who have taken up their crosses and who compose the "cloud of witnesses" referred to in the Epistle lesson (Hebrews 12:1).

Forsaking Everything

A general theme among the early Church Fathers was the leaving or forsaking worldly possessions to follow Christ. They took as their basis for this the many statements of Christ to that effect. Often this theme meant celibacy¹⁰, although the Fathers recognized that not everyone was able to do this, and no one was compelled to do this. But still, the rewards to those who could do this would be understandably greater, since their struggle was greater. Those who could not live the celibate life, at least they could take the perspective of despising worldly wealth and slavery to it.

John Chrysostom stated¹¹ that the forsaking of worldly possessions and the following of Christ go hand-in-hand: one assists the other. The rewards for doing this are dependent on man's faithfulness to this calling.

"Note how Peter's reply, 'Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed You; what shall we have therefore?' (Matthew 19:27), is according to Christ's demand. For Christ had required of the rich man these two things: to give what he had to the poor, and to follow Him. Therefore Peter expressed these two things, forsaking, and following. The forsaking was done for the sake of following, and the following was rendered easier by the forsaking, and made them feel confidence and joy regarding the forsaking".

"Christ observes the following custom regarding the good things. Though He spoke of building up rewards, should men show themselves unworthy of the promise, He will no longer do it. This sort of thing was also done regarding man after his creation, 'For the dread of you and the fear of you shall be on the wild beasts' (Genesis 9:2); but it didn't come to pass, because man proved himself unworthy of the sovereignty, even as Judas did also".

"There was a danger that men might on the one hand either despair or become more hardened at the announcement of punishment, or on the other hand fall into careless license by the promises of good things; so He remedies both these evils. If He should threaten, we need not despair; for we are able to repent, and to reverse the denunciation, like the Ninevites (Jonah 3:4-10). Since He promises good things, we should not grow negligent because of the promise. For should we appear unworthy, the fact of His having promised will be of no

¹⁰ Most of the early Church Fathers were themselves celibate.

¹¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXIV, 1.

advantage to us, but will rather bring punishment. He made the promise to us assuming that we would be worthy”.

Jerome stated¹² that the advice to sell all that we have is only addressed to those who desire to be perfect. Christ doesn't compel us to do this; He just sets the crown before us and lets us choose whether we will enter the arena to win it. We are not lost if we cannot do this. Whatever we do, we should do so honestly, and not pretend to do it like Ananias and Sapphira.

“I think it unnecessary to warn you against covetousness since it is the way of your family both to have riches and to despise them. Paul tells us that covetousness is idolatry (Ephesians 5:5, Colossians 3:5), and to one who asked the Lord the question, ‘Good Master what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?’, He replied, ‘If you will be perfect, go and sell what you have and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come and follow me’ (Matthew 19:16, 21). Such is the climax of complete and apostolic virtue: to sell all that one has, to distribute to the poor (Luke 18:22), and thus freed from all earthly encumbrance to fly up to the heavenly realms with Christ. To you, a careful stewardship is entrusted, although in such matters full freedom of choice is left to every individual, whether old or young. Christ's words are ‘if you will be perfect’. I do not compel you, He seems to say, I do not command you, but I set the palm before you, I show you the prize. It is for you to choose whether you will enter the arena and win the crown”.

Let us consider how wisely Wisdom has spoken, ‘Sell all that you have’. To whom is the command given? Why, to him to whom it was said, ‘if you will be perfect’. Don't just sell a part of your goods but ‘all that you have’. And when you have sold them, what then? ‘Give to the poor’. Not to the rich, not to your kinsfolk, not to serve self indulgence; but to relieve need. Let your praises come from the stomachs of the hungry and not from the rich banquets of the overfed. We read in the Acts of the Apostles how, while the blood of the Lord was still warm and believers were in the fervor of their first faith, they all sold their possessions and the ‘distribution was made to every man according as he had need’ (Acts 4:34-35). But Ananias and Sapphira proved timid stewards, and what is more, deceitful ones; therefore they brought on themselves condemnation. For having made a vow they offered their money to God as if it were their own and not His to whom they had vowed it. Keeping back for their own use a part of that which belonged to another, they drew down on themselves the avenging stroke, which was meant not in cruelty towards them but as a warning to others (Acts 5:1-10). The Apostle Peter did not call down death upon them; He merely announced God's judgment by the spirit of prophecy, that the doom of two persons might be a lesson to many. From the time of your dedication to perpetual virginity, your property is yours no longer; or rather it is now first truly yours because it has come to be Christ's.

John Cassian wrote¹³ of three stages of renunciation, each more difficult than the one before.

¹² Jerome, Letter to Demetrius, CXXX, 14.

¹³ John Cassian, Conference of Abbot Paphnutius, I, iii, 6.

1. We make light of all the wealth and goods of this world.
2. We reject the fashions and vices of soul and flesh.
3. We detach our soul from all present and visible things, and contemplate only things to come, and set our heart on what is invisible.

“Abraham was asked to do all three at once, when God told him, ‘Get out of your country, leave your kinsfolk, and your father’s house’ (Genesis 12:1). First He said ‘from your country’; i.e., from the goods of this world, and earthly riches. Secondly, He said ‘from your kinsfolk’; i.e., from this former life and habits and sins, which cling to us from our birth and are joined to us as it were by ties of affinity and kinship. Thirdly, He said ‘from your father’s house’; i.e., from all the recollection of this world, which the sight of the eyes can afford”.

“To these three sorts of renunciations the three books of Solomon suitably correspond. For Proverbs answers to the first renunciation, as in it the desires for carnal things and earthly sins are repressed. To the second Ecclesiastes corresponds, as there everything, which is done under the sun is declared to be vanity. To the third the Song of Songs, in which the soul soaring above all things visible, is actually joined to the Word of God by the contemplation of heavenly things”.

Jerome, writing about a famous widow named Paula (d. 404 AD), stated¹⁴ that Paula illustrated¹⁵ what the Lord said regarding leaving behind the thing of this world. While Paula will be rewarded at the Resurrection, she was also rewarded greatly in this life.

“In the Gospel the apostles ask their Lord and Savior what He will give to those who have left all for His sake; He told them that they shall receive a hundredfold now in this time and in the world to come eternal life (Mark 10:28-30). From which we see that it is not the possession of riches that is praiseworthy but the rejection of them for Christ’s sake. Instead of glorying in our privileges, we should make them of small account as compared with God’s faith. Truly He has now in this present time made good His promise to His servants and handmaidens. For one who despised the glory of a single city is today famous throughout the world; and one who while she lived at Rome was known by no one outside it has, by hiding herself at Bethlehem, become the admiration of all lands Roman and barbarian. For what race of men is there which does not send pilgrims to the holy places? And who could find there a greater marvel than Paula? As among many jewels the most precious shines most brightly, and as the sun with its beams obscures and puts out the paler fires of the stars; so by her lowliness she surpassed all others in virtue and influence. While she was least among all, she was greater than all. The more she cast herself down, the more she was lifted up by Christ. She was hidden and yet she was not hidden. By shunning glory she earned glory; for glory follows virtue as its shadow; and deserting those who seek it, it seeks those who despise it”.

Confession before Men

¹⁴ Jerome, *Letters*, CVIII, 3.

¹⁵ Thurston and Attwater, *Butler’s Lives of the Saints*, Christian Classics, Westminster, MD, 1990, January 26.

The Gospel lesson begins with the Lord's instruction that whoever confesses Him before men, He will confess before His Father, and vice versa (Matthew 10:32-33). This is the opposite of being "a secret Christian" and there are often consequences to face. For example, Joseph of Arimathea, along with Nicodemus, were secretly disciples of Jesus (John 19:38, 3:1-15, 7:50-52). When they declared themselves at Jesus' burial (John 19:38-42), they brought down the wrath of the Jewish leaders; they were arrested and later driven from Israel. Per our Gospel context, they had a glimpse of what the Lord said, "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matthew 10:28).

One issue involved is that deeds need to accompany our confession; otherwise the "confession" becomes just lip service. Another issue that was a big deal in the 2nd and 3rd Centuries is what to do about the lapsed, those who denied Christ under torture. The consensus has been that we need to show mercy to them as the Lord shows mercy to us. Christ Himself gave us an example of confession before men and taught us not to fear the consequences. As we are called on to confess before men, we realize that the legions will attempt to sift us just like they did the Apostle Peter.

John Chrysostom addressed¹⁶ this confession with the mouth by saying that He requires us to do more than just pay lip service:

"But why is He not satisfied with the faith in the mind, but requires also the confession with the mouth? To train us up to boldness in speech, and a more abundant love and determination, and to raise us up on high! The Lord applied this to His disciples and their disciples after them. 'Do you have any benefit by having confessed Me here? I will also have a benefit for you by giving you greater things, and unspeakably greater; for I will confess you there.' Do you see that both the good things and the evil things are there to be dispensed? Why hurry to seek your rewards here, when you are 'saved on hope' (Romans 8:24)? If even the enemies of the Church here applaud your deeds and confession, how shall that most tender of all Fathers fail to admire and proclaim you?"

Clement of Alexandria quoted¹⁷ a follower of a contemporary local heretic as correctly understanding what confession before men involved. Hypocrites can confess Christ before men, but the true confession includes deeds and actions.

"In explanation of this passage, Heracleon, the most distinguished of the school of the Valentinians¹⁸, says expressly, 'that there is a confession by faith and conduct, and one with the voice. The confession that is made with the voice, and before the authorities, is what most people reckon the only confession. But hypocrites also can confess with this confession! This answer is not universal; everyone who has been saved has confessed with the confession made by the voice, and departed. Confession by the lip is only partial however. That which is universal has deeds and actions corresponding to faith in Him. True confession is followed by verbal confession, before the authorities if necessary, and when

¹⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XXXIV, 3.

¹⁷ Clement of Alexandria, Stromata, IV, 9.

¹⁸ Heracleon (145-180 AD) was a follower of Valentinus, a 2nd Century heretic.

reasons dictates. He will confess rightly with his voice who has first confessed by the disposition of his life”.

Ambrose noted¹⁹ a difference in the wording toward those who confess Christ before men as compared to those who don't. Ambrose interpreted this difference in wording as relating to the “lapsed” (those who denied Christ under intense persecution), where the mercy of God was apparent in many cases.

“Where Christ says that He will confess²⁰ before His Father, He will confess ‘everyone’ (Matthew 10:32). Where He speaks of denying, He does not speak of denying ‘everyone’. We would expect that in the following clause He would have said, ‘Everyone who shall deny Me’. But in order that He might not appear to deny everyone, He concludes, ‘But **he** who shall deny Me before men, him will I also deny’ (Matthew 10:33). He promises favor to everyone, but He does not threaten the penalty to everyone. He makes more of that which is merciful; He makes less of what is penal”.

“Let us consider the meaning. ‘Everyone who shall confess Me’, that is to say, of whatever age, of whatever condition he may be, who shall confess Me, he shall have Me as the One who rewards his confession. No one who shall confess is excluded from the reward. But it is not said in like manner, ‘Everyone who shall deny shall be denied’, for it is possible that a man, overcome by torture, may deny God in word, and yet worship Him in his heart”.

“Is the case the same with him who denies voluntarily, and with him whom torture, not his own will, has led to denial? Men give credit for endurance in a struggle, how can we assume that this has no value with God? For often in this world's athletic contests the public crowns the victors and the vanquished, especially if they have seen that the vanquished lost the victory by some trick or fraud. And shall Christ allow His athletes, whom He has seen to yield for a moment to severe torments, to remain without forgiveness?”

“Shall He not take account of their work, Who will not cast off forever those whom He casts off temporarily? David says, ‘God will not forever cut off His mercy from generation to generation, nor will He forget to be merciful’ (Psalm 77:8-9). This is the prophet's declaration; on the other hand, there are those who would maintain a forgetfulness of mercy on God's part by not forgiving the lapsed”.

Cyprian of Carthage encouraged²¹ his people to watch out for the bodies of the martyrs who confessed Christ in his area, even those who died in prison of natural causes before they could be executed. Both should be commemorated with the martyrs.

“Let there be a more zealous watchfulness bestowed upon the bodies of all those who, although they were not tortured in prison, yet depart by the glorious exit of death. For their virtue and honor is sufficient for them to be allied with the blessed martyrs. As far as they could, they bore whatever they were prepared and

¹⁹ Ambrose of Milan, *Two Books Concerning Repentance*, I, iv, 16-20.

²⁰ “Therefore everyone who 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”.

²¹ Cyprian of Carthage, *Epistles*, XXXVI, 1-2.

equipped to bear. One person, under the eyes of God, has offered himself to tortures and death, and has suffered whatever he was willing to suffer. Yet it was not that he avoided the tortures, but the tortures avoided him. ‘Whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I also confess before my Father which is in heaven’ (Matthew 10:32). They have confessed Him; ‘He that endures to the end shall be saved’ (Matthew 10:22). They have endured and have carried the uncorrupted, unstained merits of their virtues through to the end. ‘Be faithful to death, and I will give you a crown of life’ (Revelation 2:10). They have persevered in their faithfulness, steadfastness and invincibility, even to death”.

Hilary of Poitiers looked back to Christ’s example of confession before men. He stated²² that Christ had no fear of death since He had the power of laying down His life, and of taking it up again. If He were forced against His will to be crucified, beaten, etc. we might have cause to doubt His fearlessness of death. He passed this same fearlessness on to His followers, since we know that we will be rewarded for a martyr’s death.

“Now first of all, Christ was not subject to fear or sorrow on His own account. Let us ask, ‘What can we find for Him to fear, that the dread of an unendurable pain should have seized Him?’ The objects of His fear, which some allege, are suffering and death. Now I ask those who are of this opinion, ‘Can we reasonably suppose that He feared death, Who drove away the terrors of death from His Apostles, exhorting them to the glory of martyrdom with the words, ‘He that does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worth of Me’; and, ‘He that finds his life shall lose it, and he that has lost his life for My sake shall find it?’ (Matthew 10:38-39) If to die for Him is life, what pain can we think He had to suffer in the mystery of death, Who rewards with life those who die for Him? Could death make Him fear what could be done to the body, when He exhorted the disciples, ‘Fear not those who kill the body?’” (Matthew 10:28)

“Further, what terror did the pain of death have for Him, to Whom death was an act of His own free will? In the human race an external enemy, such as fever, wound, accident or fall, brings on death either by an attack upon the body or our bodily nature is overcome by age, and yields to death. But the Only-begotten God, Who had the power of laying down His life, and of taking it up again (John 10:18), after being offered vinegar, bore witness that His work of human suffering was finished; and in order to accomplish in Himself the mystery of death, He bowed His head and gave up His Spirit (John 19:30). Christ might have feared death if He was forced against His will to breathe His last breath, and seek rest in death. Or He might have feared death if His beaten soul departed by the breaking up of his body, by being as it were violated in its own home by the breaking, piercing and crushing of limbs. But when He gave up the spirit and died, His death was an exercise of His own free will. And if He died of His own will, and through His own will gave back His Spirit, death had no terror; because it was in His own power”.

²² Hilary of Poitiers, On the Trinity, X, 10-11.

Jerome addressed²³ the ups and downs of this life as we battle with the legions of demons that seek to devour us as they did Judas. In the end these demons will fall like men when God judges all flesh. In the meantime, we must realize that we are being sifted as Peter was.

“So long as we are held down by this frail body, so long as we have our treasure in earthen vessels (2 Corinthians 4:7); so long as the flesh lusts against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh (Galatians 5:17), there can be no sure victory. ‘Our adversary the devil goes about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour’ (1 Peter 5:8). ‘You make darkness’, David says, ‘and it is night, in which all the beasts of the forest creep about. The young lions roar after their prey, and seek their food from God’ (Psalm 104:20-21). The devil looks not for unbelievers, for those who are outside, whose flesh the Babylonian king roasted²⁴ in the furnace (Jeremiah 29:22). It is the church of Christ that he ‘makes haste to spoil’ (Isaiah 8:1), where ‘His food is of the choicest’ (Habakkuk 1:16 LXX). A Job is the victim of his machinations, and after devouring Judas he seeks power to sift the other Apostles (Luke 22:31). Christ came not to send peace upon the earth but a sword (Matthew 10:34). Lucifer fell, who used to rise at dawn (Isaiah 14:12 LXX). He who was bred in a paradise of delight had the well-earned sentence passed upon him, ‘Though you exalt yourself as the eagle, and though you set your nest among the stars, from there will I bring you down, says the Lord’ (Obadiah 1:4). He had said in his heart, ‘I will exalt my throne above the stars of God’, and ‘I will be like the Most High’ (Isaiah 14:13-14). As they descend the ladder that Jacob saw (Genesis 28:12) in his dream, God says every day to the fallen angels, ‘I have said you are gods and all of you are children of the Most High. But you shall die like men and fall like one of the princes’ (Psalm 82:6-7). The devil fell first, and since “God stands in the congregation of the gods and judges among the gods (Psalm 82:1 LXX), the Apostle writes to those who are ceasing to be gods, ‘For where *there are* envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like *mere* men?’” (1 Corinthians 3:3).

Love for Family versus Love for Christ

The Lord went on to say that He who loves father, mother, son or daughter more than Him is not worthy of Him. He carried this to the point of taking up one’s Cross to do so (Matthew 10:37-38).

The Mosaic Law had commanded us to honor our parents, and the death penalty applied to those who didn’t. But this doesn’t apply if our natural parents hinder us from godliness. In the Church, where rich and poor all share the same cup at the Lord’s Table, we have our eternal family. Since the rich and poor are both temples of the Holy Spirit, we must be careful to avoid honoring one above the other based on material things, since Christ dwells in both. The bottom line is that our worst enemy is our own heart. Bad men have always tried to work their way into the Church, but these will not disturb us if we are at peace within ourselves. Friendship with wicked men is another matter; this could end up with us being bound in their sins.

²³ Jerome, Letters, XXII, 4.

²⁴ Those roasted were some false prophets, not the three young men recorded in Daniel.

John Chrysostom put this in terms of preferring the love of God to the love of relatives. He pointed out that Moses had blessed the tribe of Levi just before he died for regarding the Lord's commandments as more important than their parents and their brethren (Deuteronomy 34:8-9). Moses had commanded the Levites at the time of the Golden Calf to take out their swords and slay their relatives, friends, neighbors and children who had been promoting the worship of the idol (Exodus 32:27-29).

Chrysostom pointed out²⁵ that Paul said, "Children, obey your parents *in the Lord*, for this is right" (Ephesians 6:1). This is good, but "in the Lord" implies that the parents do not hinder godliness.

"For indeed it is a sacred duty to render them all other honors; but when they demand more than is due, one ought not to obey. 'If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple' (Luke 14:26). God does not command simply to hate one's relatives, since this were even quite contrary to the Law (Exodus 20:12); but when one desires to be loved more than God, hate him in this respect".

Cyprian of Carthage pointed out²⁶ that we all share in the Lord's Table, and we all bring a sacrifice. When the poor widow offered her two mites, which was all she had, she lent it to God. She who should receive alms gave alms shaming the rich who give nothing. The widow of Zarephath, expecting to eat her last meal and die with her children, gave some first to Elijah and was rewarded beyond her wildest expectation. This illustrates to us that we should prefer our fellow servants even to our own children and our children will learn from us. This widow's child that witnessed Elijah's miracle and that Elijah later raised from the dead grew up to be known²⁷ as the Prophet Jonah. This teaches us that refusing to share an abundant estate with the poverty of the needy is a great sin.

"You who are wealthy and rich, do you think that you celebrate the Lord's Supper, when you come to the Lord's Supper without a sacrifice, and take part of the sacrifice, which the poor man has offered? Consider the widow that remembered the heavenly precepts, doing good in her poverty, casting two mites, which were all that she had, into the treasury. The Lord observed, regarding her work not for its abundance, but for its intention, and considering not how much, but from how much, she had given. 'Truly I say unto you, that widow has cast in more than everyone. For all these have cast into the offering of God out of their abundance; but she, out of her poverty has cast in everything she had' (Luke 21:3-4). Greatly blessed woman, who even before the Day of Judgment, was worthy to be praised by the voice of the Judge! Let the rich be ashamed of their barrenness and unbelief. The widow, needy in means, is found rich in works. Even though all good works focus on the relief of widows and orphans, she gives, who ought to receive, that we may know what punishment awaits the barren rich man, when by this instance even the poor ought to labor in good works. In order that we may understand that their labors are given to God, and that whoever performs them

²⁵ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew*, XXXV, 3.

²⁶ Cyprian of Carthage, *Treatises*, VIII, 15-17.

²⁷ Nickolai Velimirovic, *Prologue From Ochrid*, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, September 22.

deserves well of the Lord, Christ calls this ‘the offering of God’ (Luke 21:4). He states that the widow has cast in two mites into the offering of God, that it may be evident that he who has pity on the poor lends to God”.

“In spiritual expenditure, we ought to think of Christ, who has declared that He receives our gifts. We should prefer our fellow servants, to our children, since He Himself instructs us, saying, ‘He that loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and he that loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me’ (Matthew 10:37). For strengthening of faith and the love of God, Moses wrote, ‘The Tribe of Levi said to their fathers or mothers, I have not known you; neither did they acknowledge their children, these have observed Your words, and kept Your covenant’ (Deuteronomy 33:9). If we love God with our whole heart, we ought not to prefer either our parents or children to God. John laid this down in his epistle that the love of God is not in them whom we see unwilling to labor for the poor. ‘Whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?’ (1 John 3:17) For if by almsgiving to the poor we are lending to God — and when it is given to the least it is given to Christ — there is no ground for anyone preferring earthly things to heavenly, nor for considering human things before divine”.

“The widow of Zarephath, in the drought and famine, having consumed everything, she had made a small loaf of the little meal and oil which was left, and, having used this, was about to die with her children. Elijah came and asked that something should first be given him to eat, and then of what remained that she and her children should eat. She did not hesitate to obey; nor did the mother prefer her children to Elijah in her hunger and poverty. She did a thing that pleases God. She did not give Elijah a portion out of her abundance, but the whole out of a little, and he was fed before her hungry children. In her poverty and want she did not think of food before mercy; in a saving work, the life according to the flesh was despised, the soul according to the spirit was preserved. Therefore Elijah, being the type of Christ, showing that according to His mercy He returns to each their reward, answered, ‘Thus says the Lord God of Israel, ‘The bin of flour shall not be used up, nor shall the jar of oil run dry, until the day the Lord sends rain on the earth’ (1 Kings 17:14). According to her faith in the divine promise, those things, which she gave, were multiplied to the widow; and her righteous works of mercy increased; the vessels of meal and oil were filled. The mother did not take away from her children what she gave to Elijah, but rather she conferred upon her children what she did kindly and piously. And she did not as yet know Christ; she had not yet heard His precepts; she did not repay meat and drink for His blood. From this it appears how much he sins in the Church, who, preferring himself and his children to Christ, preserves his wealth, and does not share an abundant estate with the poverty of the needy”.

John Chrysostom stated²⁸ that God asks us to love Him as He loves us. He prefers to be called Father more than Master, even though both are appropriate. He calls it “glory” to be loved by us and to have the privilege of suffering on our behalf.

²⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, X, vv. 3-4.

“When the prodigal came back, there were flutes, harps, dancing and feasts. The father might have called his son to account for his ill-timed extravagance, but he did nothing of the sort, and could not find it in him even to use the language of reproach. Instead he threw himself upon him, kissed him, killed the calf, put a robe upon him, and placed on him abundant honors. Let us then be of good cheer and not despair. He is not so well pleased with being called Master, as being called Father, nor with having a slave as with having a son. This then is why He did all that He has done. He ‘spared not His Only-begotten Son’ (Romans 8:32), that we might receive the adoption of sons, that we might love Him, not as a Master only, but as a Father. He takes delight in doing this as one that has glory given him, and proclaims it to all, though He needs nothing from us. This is what He did in Abraham’s case, using these words, ‘I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob’ (Matthew 22:32). This is why He said to Peter, ‘Do you love Me more than these?’ (John 21:17), to show that He seeks nothing so much as this from us. He asked Abraham to offer his son to Him, that He might make it known to all that He was greatly loved by the patriarch. Now this desire to be loved greatly comes from loving greatly. Because of this, He said to the Apostles, ‘He that loves father or mother more than Me, is not worthy of Me’ (Matthew 10:37). For this cause He asks us to acknowledge that which is closest to us, our soul (or, life, John 5:39, and John 12:25), as second to the love for him, since He wishes to be loved by us with our entire being. If we have no strong feelings about a person, we have no strong desire for his friendship either, though he is great and noble. Whereas when we love anyone warmly, though the person loved is of low rank and humble, yet we consider love from him as a very great honor. For this reason He Himself also called it glory, not only to be loved by us, but even to suffer those shameful things on our behalf” (John 12:23).

Cyril of Jerusalem stated²⁹ that we should not forget that we are commanded to love and obey our parents so long as they put no obstacle to godliness in our way. There are rewards for doing so and penalties for failing to do so.

“While honoring our heavenly Father let us honor also the fathers of our flesh (Hebrews 12:9), since the Lord Himself has so appointed in the Law and the Prophets, saying, ‘Honor your father and your mother, that it may be well with you, and your days shall be long in the Land’ (Deuteronomy 5:16). Let this commandment be especially observed by those here present who have fathers and mothers. ‘Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing to the Lord’ (Colossians 3:20). For the Lord did not say, ‘He that loves father or mother is not worthy of Me’, lest from ignorance you might mistake what was written, but He added, ‘more than Me’ (Matthew 10:37). For when our fathers on earth have a contrary mind to our Father in heaven, then we must obey Christ’s word. But when they put no obstacle to godliness in our way, if we are ever carried away by ingratitude, and, forgetting their benefits to us, hold them in contempt, then the oracle will have place which says, ‘He that curses father or mother, let him be put to death’” (Exodus 21:17, Leviticus 20:9, Matthew 15:4).

²⁹ Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, VII, 15-16.

“The first virtue of godliness in Christians is to honor their parents, to be grateful for the troubles of those who begot them, and with all their might to confer on them what tends to their comfort. Even if we should repay them ever so much, we shall never be able to return their gift of life. They also may enjoy the comfort provided by us, and may confirm us in those blessings which Jacob, the supplanter, shrewdly seized. Our Father in heaven may accept our good purpose, and judge us worthy ‘to shine among the righteous as the sun in the kingdom of our Father’” (Matthew 13:43).

John Cassian stated³⁰ that our worst enemy in this is our own heart. If we can achieve a real peace in our own heart, the rest of the world is not to be feared. Bad men will try to work their way into the Church, such as Judas and Nicholas of Antioch (Acts 6:5); but these will not disturb us if we are at peace within ourselves.

“We need not seek for our peace in externals, nor fancy that another person’s patience helps our impatience. For just as ‘the kingdom of God is within you’ (Luke 17:21), so ‘a man’s foes are those of his own household’ (Matthew 10:36). No one is more my enemy than my own heart, which is truly the one of my household closest to me. Therefore if we are careful, internal enemies cannot possibly injure us. For where those of our own household are not opposed to us, there also the kingdom of God is secured in peace of heart. If you diligently investigate the matter, any man, however spiteful, cannot injure me, if I do not fight against myself with warlike heart. But if I am injured, the fault is not owing to the other’s attack, but to my own impatience. Just as strong and solid food is good for a man in good health, so it is bad for a sick one. But it cannot hurt the man who takes it, unless he is weak. If then any similar temptation ever arises among brethren, we need never be shaken and give an opening to the blasphemous snarls of men living in the world. Some bad and detestable men will secretly find their way into the number of the saints, because so long as we are trodden down and trampled in the threshing floor of this world, the chaff which is destined for eternal fire is quite sure to be mingled with the choicest of the wheat. We should bear in mind that Satan was chosen among the angels, and Judas among the apostles, and Nicholas the author of a detestable heresy among the deacons; it should be no wonder that the basest of men are found among the ranks of the saints. For although some maintain that this Nicholas³¹ was not the same man, who was chosen for the work of the ministry by the Apostles, nevertheless they cannot deny that he was of the number of the disciples”.

Gregory the Great stated³² that our joining in friendship with the wicked means that we are bound in their sins. Those who are at peace with God, Gregory admonished not to be afraid at the disturbance that sometimes occurs when we need to rebuke someone out of love. But always continue loving the person that receives the rebuke.

³⁰ John Cassian, Conference of Abbot Piamun, XVIII, 16.

³¹ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, I, 26, stated that the Nicolaitans are definitely the followers of Nicholas of Antioch. Hippolytus, Philos. VII, para 36, Epiphanius, Haer. I. ii. Para 25 also claim this Nicholas was the same as Nicholas of Antioch.

³² Gregory the Great, Book of Pastoral Rule, III, 22.

“The Truth says, ‘Do not think that I came to send peace on earth; I came not to send peace, but a sword’ (Matthew 10:34). For, when we unwarily join in friendship with the wicked, we are bound in their sins. Jehoshaphat, who was extolled by so many praises for his previous life, was rebuked for his friendship with King Ahab as though bordering on destruction. The prophet said to him, ‘You give help to the wicked and love those who hate the Lord. Therefore the wrath of the Lord is upon you. Nevertheless good works are found in you, in that you have removed the wooden images from the Land, and have prepared your heart to seek God (2 Chronicles 19:2-3). Our life is at variance with Him, who is supremely righteous, by our agreement in friendship with the perverse. Those, who are at peace, should be admonished not to be afraid of disturbing their temporal peace, if they need to express words of rebuke. They should be admonished to keep inwardly the same peace, with undiminished love, which they disturb in their external relations, by their reproofing voice. Both of these things David declares that he had prudently observed, saying, ‘I was peaceable among them that hated peace; when I spoke to them, they made war against me without a cause’ (Psalm 120:7 LXX). When he spoke, they fought him; yet, when they fought against him, he was peaceable, because he neither ceased to reprove those that were mad against him, nor forgot to love those who were reproofed. Paul says, ‘If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men’ (Romans 12:18). It was difficult for them, if they rebuked evil deeds, to be able to have peace with all. But, when temporal peace is disturbed in the hearts of bad men through our rebuke, it is necessary that it should be kept inviolate in our own heart. Rightly, therefore, he says, ‘As much as lies in you, continue to live peaceably with all men’. It is indeed as though he said, ‘Since peace stands in the consent of two parties, if it is driven out by those who are reproofed, let it nevertheless be retained undiminished in your mind. The same apostle again admonishes his disciples, saying, ‘If anyone does not obey our word in this Epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed’. And immediately he added, ‘Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother’ (2 Thessalonians 3:14-15). As if to say, ‘Don’t break outward peace with him, but guard in the core of your heart your internal peace concerning him’. Your discord with him may so affect the mind of the sinner that peace departs does not from your hearts even though it is denied to him”.

The Example of the Twelve Apostles: Loving Christ More than Family

The last section of the Gospel lesson gives an example of loving the Lord more than relatives. Here we see the Lord’s words to His Apostles commending them for loving Him more than their relatives. Peter said to Jesus: “See, we have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we have?” Jesus replied that they (the Twelve) would 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 hundred fold, and inherit eternal life” (Matthew 19:27-29).

Peter and Andrew had immediately left their nets and their fishing trade when the Lord called them (Matthew 4:19-20). Matthew left his lucrative business at the tax office to follow Jesus (Matthew 9:9). Chrysostom pointed out that the Lord did not promise them anything grand immediately; only that they should be “fishers of men” (Matthew 4:19). Because of their faithfulness, they were rewarded with reigning with Him (2 Timothy 2:12).

Ambrose of Milan described³³ the twelve thrones promised to the Twelve as being separate from the Throne of God, just as the seats of the twenty-four elders are separate. The twelve thrones refer to the spiritual grace given to the Twelve.

“Not to the angels, then, has Christ given the honor of sitting with Him, nor to the elders who worship Him that sits. They do not sit upon the seat of majesty, but around the throne; for there are twenty-four other seats: ‘And upon the seats twenty-four elders sitting’ (Revelation 11:16). In the Gospel the Lord Himself says, ‘When the Son of Man shall sit on the throne of His glory, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel’ (Matthew 19:28). He did not say that a share in His own throne could be given to the Apostles, but that there were those other twelve thrones. We shouldn’t think of these as referring to actual sitting down, but as showing the happy issue of spiritual grace”.

John Chrysostom stated³⁴ that the Twelve will judge just the Jews, but in a manner similar to the Queen of the South. The “thrones” of the Twelve represent unspeakable honor for the Twelve.

“The Apostles will not sit as judges, (in the same sense that Christ will) but like the Queen of the South and the Ninevites shall condemn that generation; so now these also. Therefore He said they would judge not the nations and the world, but the tribes of Israel. Both the Jews and the Apostles alike had been brought up under the same laws, and customs. When the Jews said that they could not believe in Christ, because the Law forbid them to receive Christ’s commandments, by bringing forward these men, who had received the same Law, and yet had believed, He condemns all those”.

“Neither do the thrones signify a sitting (in judgment), for He alone is the one that shall sit and judge, but honor and glory unspeakable did He imply by the thrones”.

Rewards for Confessing Christ

There are rewards in this life to those who manage to escape slavery and attachment to the things of this life and who are able to see beyond the things of this life. We can think of giving up the things of this world as a long-term loan to God, where the main return on investment occurs at the Resurrection. However, there is a hundredfold return here in this life, such as was experienced by the Early Church following Pentecost. There is a special reward for those who, like the Twelve, are able to live celibate.

³³ Ambrose, *Exposition of the Christian Faith*, V, vi, 73.

³⁴ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew*, LXIV, 1-2.

The rewards for confessing Christ are often spoken of by contrasting them with the end of those who love the things of this world. John Chrysostom compared³⁵ our use of earthly things versus our attachment to them. If we disregard the things of this world, He lets us use them because we are then not enslaved to them. Christ accomplishes contraries by means of contraries and He is not bound by nature.

“When we have proved that our mind is made perfect, and have shown that we disregard earthly things, then earthly things also are given to us; but not before; lest being bound to them, we should be bound tighter. Loosen yourself from your slavery first, and then receive, that you may receive it no longer as a slave, but as a master. Despise riches, and you shall be rich. Despise glory, and you shall be glorious. Despise the avenging yourself on your enemies, and then shall you attain it. Despise rest, and then you shall receive it not as a prisoner, nor as a slave, but as a freeman”.

“For as in the case of little children, when the child eagerly desires childish playthings, we hide them from him with much care, as a ball, for instance, that he may not be hindered from necessary things. But when he thinks little of them, and no longer longs for them, we give them fearlessly, knowing that the desire no longer has enough strength to draw him away from things necessary. So God also, when He sees that we no longer eagerly desire the things of this world, then He permits us to use them. We possess them as freemen, not as children!”

“Furthermore, if you despise avenging yourself on your enemies, you will then attain it; hear what He says, ‘If your enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink, for in so doing, you shall heap coals of fire on his head’ (Romans 12:20). And again, if you despise riches, you shall then obtain them; hear Christ saying, ‘There is no man, who has left father, mother, house, or brethren, who shall not receive a hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life’ (Matthew 19:29). And if you despise glory, you shall then attain it; again hear Christ Himself saying, ‘He that will be first among you, let him be your slave’ (Matthew 20:26). And again, ‘For whosoever shall humble himself, he shall be exalted’” (Matthew 23:12).

“What are you saying? If I give drink to my enemy, do I then punish him? If I give up my goods, do I then possess them? If I humble myself, shall I then be exalted? Yes, He says, for such is My power, to give contraries by means of contraries. I abound in resources and in contrivances; do not be afraid. The ‘Nature of things’ follows My will; I do not wait for Nature. I do all things; I am not controlled by them; therefore I am able to change their form and order”.

Cyprian of Carthage compared³⁶ people who are weighed down by earthly desires to those who are able to leave it behind and who have contempt for worldly wealth. The reward is great in heaven for those who are able to see beyond the things of this life.

“How can they follow Christ, who are held back by the chain of their wealth? Or how can they seek heaven, and climb to lofty heights, who are weighed down by earthly desires? They think that they possess, when they are

³⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, XXV, 4.

³⁶ Cyprian, Treatises, III, 12.

rather possessed; as slaves of their profit, and not lords of their own money, their money enslaves them. The Apostle indicates these times and these men when he says, ‘⁹But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and *into* many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. ‘For the love of money is a root of all *kinds of* evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows’ (1 Timothy 6:9-10). But with what rewards does the Lord invite us to contempt of worldly wealth? With what compensation does He atone for the small, trifling losses of this present time? ‘There is no man that leaves house, land, parents, brethren, wife, or children, for the kingdom of God’s sake, but he shall receive a hundredfold now in this time, but in the age to come, eternal life’ (Mark 10:29-30). If we know these things, and have found them out from the truth of the Lord, loss of this kind is not to be feared, but even to be desired. The Lord Himself again announces and warns us, ‘Blessed are you when men shall persecute you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall cast you out, and shall speak of your name as evil, for the Son of man’s sake! Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy; for indeed your reward is great in heaven’” (Luke 6:22).

We have an example of this “hundredfold” return on investment in the Early Church following Pentecost. John Chrysostom noted³⁷ that when, “All that believed were together, and had all things in common” (Acts 2:44), this early Christian community was a collection of cheerful givers. The result was very beneficial not just to them but also to the community. They immediately obtained a reward, that is, the ‘hundredfold’ that Jesus spoke of (Mark 10:29-30), for having left everything for Christ’s sake. In this case, the reward was ‘the favor with all the people’ (Acts 2:47).

John Chrysostom compared³⁸ giving up our worldly possessions, even if only partially, to a long-term loan to God. The main return on investment will take place at the Resurrection, but there is still a hundred-fold return promised in this life. If we received the entire return on investment in this life, it would be corruptible; therefore we receive most of the return at the Resurrection.

“Why don’t you give to Him, who will assuredly pay you back in greater abundance? Perhaps it is because it is so long before He repays. Yet surely He repays even here in this life. For He said, ‘Seek the kingdom of heaven, and all these things shall be added to you’ (Matthew 6:33). Those goods have been stored up for you, and are not diminishing; these goods here He gives by way of increase and surplus. The very fact of its being so long before you receive it, makes your riches greater, since the interest is more. Even with moneylenders in this life, a long-term loan generates a greater gain to the lender. In man’s case we are not offended at a long-term loan, but in the case of God are we so small-minded? He both gives here, and He there keeps the whole in store. For the abundance of what is given, and the excellence of that gift, transcends this present

³⁷ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, VII, v. 46.

³⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, VII, v. 31.

worthless life. Since in this perishable body, there is not even the possibility of receiving those unfading crowns, nor of attaining that unchangeable inheritance”.

“Suppose someone owed you gold while you were staying in a foreign country, and had neither servants, nor any means to convey it to the place where you were staying. If he promised to repay you the loan, you would ask him in countless ways to have it paid not in the foreign land, but rather at home. Do you think it right that you should receive those spiritual and unutterable things in this world? What madness this would show! For if you receive them here, you will certainly have them corrupted; but if you wait for that time, He will repay them to you incorruptible. If you receive here, you have gotten lead; but if there, pure gold. Still He does not deprive you of the goods of this life. For along with that promise He has placed another, to the following effect, that everyone that loves the things of the world to come, shall receive ‘a hundredfold in this present life, and shall inherit eternal life’ (Matthew 19:29). If then we do not receive the hundredfold, we have ourselves to blame for not lending to Him, Who can give so much; for all who have given have received much, even though they gave little”.

Ambrose of Milan compared³⁹ the “unprofitable servants” (Luke 17:10) with those who give up everything and live celibate. The latter are like the Twelve Apostles, who gave up everything, and who have perhaps been given more talents than others in order to be able to live as they do, and who will be highly rewarded for their faith.

“Those who have fulfilled the commandments are able to say, ‘We are unprofitable servants, we have done that which was our duty to do’ (Luke 17:10). The virgin does not say this, nor he who sold all his goods, but they rather await the stored-up rewards like the holy Apostle who said, ‘Behold we have forsaken everything and followed You; what shall we have therefore?’ (Matthew 19:27) He does not say, like the unprofitable servant, that he has done that which was his duty to do, but as being profitable to his Master. He has multiplied the talents entrusted to him by the increase he has gained, having a good conscience; without anxiety as to his merits, he expects the reward of his faith and virtue. And so it is said to him and the others, ‘you who have followed Me, in the regeneration, when the Son of Man shall sit in the throne of His glory, shall also sit upon twelve thrones, judging the tribes of Israel’ (Matthew 19:28). To those who had faithfully preserved their talents He promises rewards indeed, though smaller saying, ‘Because you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things’ (Matthew 25:21). He who has kept good faith has deserved that good faith should be kept with him; he who has made good profit, because he has not sought his own benefit, has gained a claim to a heavenly reward”.

John Chrysostom stated⁴⁰ that Christ does not withhold worldly things from us, but He considers our weakness and grants us some things in order that we might not become fainthearted.

“God from the beginning, knowing that the human race needs much condescension, bestows on us not only the things in the world to come, but also those here. For instance, Christ said to His disciples, ‘Whoever has left houses,

³⁹ Ambrose of Milan, Concerning Widows, XII, 74.

⁴⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, XXIII, 3.

brethren, sisters, father, or mother, shall receive a hundredfold and shall inherit everlasting life' (Matthew 19:29). And again, 'Seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you' (Matthew 6:33). Do you see that these things are given by Him in the way of addition, that we might not faint? Just as athletes have the benefit of careful attention, even when engaged in combat, but do not then enjoy complete ease, living under rules; yet afterwards they enjoy it completely. So God also does not grant us here to partake of 'complete' ease. But He does give us some".

John Cassian stated⁴¹ that there were some people in his day that claimed that Christ's promise of a hundredfold return would be given during the millennium following the Resurrection. A better interpretation, he said, refers to the life of a monk, where their love for each other is a hundred times better than carnal love, their continence is a hundred time better than sexual intercourse, and the adoption as sons they receive is a hundred times better than the possession of houses and fields.

"That recompense of reward, wherein the Lord promises a hundredfold in this life to those whose renunciation is perfect (Matthew 19:29), is rightly and truly taken in the same sense without any disturbance of faith. For many taking occasion by this saying, insist with crass intelligence that these things will be given carnally in the millennium. They must certainly admit that age, which they say will be after the resurrection, cannot possibly be understood as being like the present. There is a more credible interpretation. Those, who at the persuasion of Christ has made light of any worldly affections or goods, receive from the brethren and partners of his life, who are joined to him by a spiritual tie, even in this life a love, which is a hundred times better. It is certain that among parents, children, brothers, wives and relations, that love is tolerably short lived and easily broken. Even good and duteous children when they have grown up, are sometimes shut out by their parents from their homes and property. Sometimes for a really good reason, the tie of matrimony is severed, and a quarrelsome division destroys the property of brothers".

"Monks alone maintain a lasting union in intimacy, and possess all things in common, as they hold that everything that belongs to their brethren is their own, and that everything which is their own is their brethren's. If then the grace of the love between monks is compared to those affections where the bond of union is a carnal love, certainly it is a hundred times sweeter and finer. There will indeed also be gained from conjugal continence a pleasure that is an hundred times greater than that which arises from the union of the sexes. And instead of that joy, which a man experiences from the possession of a single field or house, he will enjoy a delight in riches a hundred times greater, if he passes over to the adoption of sons of God. If he possesses as his own all things which belong to the eternal Father, he can assert, 'All things that the Father has are mine' (John 16:15). If he is free from care and glad at heart, he succeeds everywhere to hear daily the announcement made to him by Paul, 'For all things are yours, whether the world, or things present, or things to come' (1 Corinthians 3:22), and by Solomon: 'The faithful man has a whole world for riches' (Proverbs 17:6 LXX).

⁴¹ John Cassian, Conference of Abbot Abraham, XXIV, 26.

You have then that recompense of a hundredfold brought out by the greatness of the value, and the difference of the character that cannot be estimated”.

The Will of God

In all this, it is critical to know and understand the Will of God in one’s life. One distinguishing characteristic of those enrolled in the communion of saints is a willingness to submit their will to the Will of God. This is one of the bases for the Gospel lesson:

- Confessing the Lord vs. denying Him before men (Matthew 10:32-33)
- Loving the Lord more than relatives (Matthew 10:37)
- Taking up one’s cross and following Him (Matthew 10:38).

Each of the above three items requires an act of will. And hindering our obedience to the Will of God is the will of the flesh (John 1:13) which tends to draw us away from the Will of God.

Following is a breakdown of references to the Greek word *thelema*, meaning “will,” including its verb forms meaning “to will.” It is used to refer both to the Will of God, our human will and the will of the flesh. Not only do we need to conform our human will to the Will of God, but we need to obey the Will of God and understand it. Not doing so can result in us being held captive by the snare of the devil to do his will (2 Timothy 2:26).

The Will of God versus Human Will versus the Will of the Flesh

The Will of God

General Characteristics

- Abides forever (2 Peter 1:21)
- Created all things (Revelation 4:11, Philippians 2:13)
- Orders all comings and goings (Acts 18:21, 21:14; 1 Cor. 4:19; James 4:15; Rom. 15:32, 1:10)
- Atoned for our sins (Hebrews 10:10)
- Desires all to come; desires that none perish (Matt. 18:14; John 6:40)
- Is patient with us (Romans 9:22)
- Source of prophesy (2 Peter 1:21)
- Established Apostles (1 Cor. 1:1; 2 Cor. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; Col. 1:1; 2 Tim. 1:1)
- Contains specific directions for everyone (1 Thess. 4:1-8)

Obedience to the Will of God is Required

- We pray “Thy Will be done” (Matthew 6:10)
- Only those doing the Will of God are saved (Matt. 7:21, 21:30-31; Luke 12:46-48; Acts 13:22)
- This needs to be done from the heart (Eph. 6:6)
- By obeying, we become the Lord’s brother or sister (Matt. 12:50)

Understanding the Will of God

- Not understanding the Will of God is foolishness (Eph. 5:17)
- Those who will (Greek: *thelo*) to do the Will (Greek: *thelema*) of God have the ability to know correct teaching (John 7:17)
- Jesus equips us to do the Will of God (Hebrews 13:21)
- Paul prayed that the Colossians might be filled with the knowledge of the Will of God (Col. 1:9)
- Epaphras prayed that the Colossians might stand firm and complete in all the well of God (Colossians 4:12)
- Ananias of Damascus prophesied at Paul's conversion that Paul had been appointed to know the will of God (Acts 22:14)
- The Jews under the Old Covenant had been given the opportunity to know the Will of God (Romans 2:18)

Results of the Will of God

- It is the Will of God that we be delivered from this evil age (Gal. 1:4)
- Being transformed by the renewing of our mind proves what the Will of God is (Romans 12:2)
- The Will of God includes the resurrection of the saints (John 6:39)
- By doing the Will of God, we silence the ignorance of fools (1 Peter 2:15)
- Doing the Will of God sometimes requires suffering (1 Peter 3:17, 4:19)
- God hears us when we do His Will (John 9:31)
- If we ask anything according to His Will, He hears us (1 John 5:14)
- The Will of God is at work in the Churches (2 Corinthians 8:3-5)
- Sometimes the Will of God is accompanied by miracles (Heb. 2:4; Matt. 8:2-3)
- For all this, we need to be grateful (1 Thess. 5:18)

Human Will: the Will of Man

Needs to be conformed to the Will of God

- Jesus conformed His human will to the Will of the Father (Matt. 26:39-42; Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42). Note that He has two natures and thus two wills.
- He did not seek His own (human) will but the Will of the Father who sent Him (John 5:30, 6:38, 4:34; Hebrews 10:7-9)
- Conforming our will to the Will of God illumines us (John 7:17)
- We need to exercise authority over our human will (1 Cor. 7:37; 2 Thess. 3:10)

The Fears and Frailties of Our Human Will

We may fear to do the Will of God e.g.:

- Paul going to Jerusalem (Acts 21:14)
- Jesus going to the Cross (Matthew 26:39-42)
- The Twelve receiving Jesus into the boat (John 6:19-21)

Salvation Depends on Submission to the Will of God

- Human will alone will not help (Romans 9:16)

- No prophecy was ever made by an act of human will (2 Peter 1:21)
- Our human will needs to recognize that faith without works is useless (James 2:20)
- Consider the parable of the Two Sons, where one said he'd go but didn't and the other said he wouldn't but did: It matters what we will to do regarding the Will of our Father (Matthew 21:28-31)

The Will of the Flesh

- The will of the flesh can reproduce after its own kind (John 1:13) and may be unforgiving (Luke 15:28)
- Some people are held captive by the snare of the devil to do his will (2 Tim. 2:26)
- Jesus was delivered to the will of the mob (Luke 23:25), where the mob was doing the will of the devil (1 Corinthians 2:7-8)
- We are to live our lives not for the lusts of men (the will of the flesh) but for the Will of God (1 Peter 4:2)

A GREAT CLOUD OF WITNESSES

June 7, 2015
Sunday of All Saints
Revision G

Epistle: Hebrews 11:32-12:2

Parts of today's Epistle lesson are used in the Eastern lectionary also for the Sunday Before Christmas (Hebrews 11:9-40) and for the 1st Sunday of Lent (Hebrews 11:24-26, 32-40). On the Sunday Before Christmas, we look backward to see where we have come; on the 1st Sunday of Lent, the theme is a vision of where we are going as we point toward Easter Sunday (or Pascha). In today's Epistle lesson, we look at the communion of Saints.

The Western lectionaries also use parts of today's Epistle lesson. Verses 8-19 are sometimes used for the 14th Sunday after Trinity and verses 1-19 are sometimes used for the 3rd Sunday after Epiphany. Thus East and West emphasize different parts of Hebrews 11.

Introduction: Who Is Referred To?

Some have referred to Hebrews 11 as "God's Hall of Fame". Listed in Table I are some of the people referred to in Hebrews 11:32-38 along with some of the hardships they endured. Both martyrs and others are included. Most of these examples are found in the Scriptures. A few, like Isaiah being sawn in half by King Manasseh, are described in other traditional sources⁴².

All these had given up riches or relationships for the Lord's Name. David as king and Joseph as second in command in Egypt, did have wealth. But they also had considerable hardship beforehand.

While all these obtained a good testimony through faith (Hebrews 11:39), they were not made perfect apart from us (Hebrews 11:40). Why? The answer is given in the section preceding our Epistle lesson (Hebrews 11:8-16), and in the section that follows (Hebrews 12:22-25).

In the section preceding the Epistle lesson, the patriarchs Abraham and Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and Moses were introduced as accomplishing something by faith. Yet they waited for the city, which has solid foundations and whose craftsman and builder is God (Hebrews 11:10). The section following the Epistle lesson (Hebrews 12:22-25) lists various aspects of this city that we have come to:

Mount Zion
The City of the Living God
The Heavenly Jerusalem
An Innumerable Company of Angels
An Assembly and Church of Firstborn Ones

⁴² Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, May 9.
The pseudepigraphal Martyrdom of Isaiah.

TABLE I
Hebrews 11 References

Statement in Hebrews	References	Account Details
Subdued Kingdoms	Barak	Judges 4
	Gideon	Judges 7
	Jephthah	Judges 11
	Samson	Judges 14
	David	2 Samuel 5:17-25; 8-10
Wrought Righteousness	Samuel	1 Samuel 12:4
	David	2 Samuel 8:15; 9:1
	Nathan	2 Samuel 12
Obtained Promises	Christ will come from David	2 Samuel 7:11-17
Shut Mouths of Lions	Samson	Judges 14:6
	David	1 Samuel 17:34-35
	Daniel	Daniel 6:16-22
Quenched Power of Fire	Shadrach, Meshach, Abed-Nego	Daniel 3:19-27
Escaped Edge of Sword	Moses from Pharaoh	Exodus 18:4
	David from Saul	1 Samuel 23, 24
Empowered from Weakness	Elijah	1 Kings 19
	Elisha	2 Kings 6
Became Strong in Battle	Gideon	Judges 7, 8
	Samson	Judges 15, 16
	David	2 Samuel 8, 17
	Joshua	Joshua 5-12
	Gideon	Judges 7
Put Armies to Flight	Elisha	2 Kings 7
	Elijah	1 Kings 17:19-23
Women Received dead by Resurrection	Elisha	2 Kings 4:31-37
	Jeremiah	Jeremiah 37:15-16
Tortured, Beaten to Death	Amos	Prologue, June 15
	Ezekiel	Prologue, July 21
	Jeremiah	Jeremiah 20:2
Tried by Mocking & Scourging	Jeremiah	Jeremiah 20:2
Endured Chains & Imprisonment	Joseph	Genesis 39:7-23
	Micaiah	1 Kings 22:12-28
	Jeremiah	Jeremiah 37:15-16
Stoned	Zechariah, the Priest	2 Chronicles 24:20-22
	Naboth	1 Kings 21:11-15
	Jeremiah	Prologue, May 1
	Baruch	Prologue, September 28
Sawn in Two	Isaiah	Prologue, May 9
Murdered with sword	Many Prophets	1 Kings 19:10
	John the Baptist	Matthew 14:3-12
	Uriah, the Prophet	Jeremiah 26:20-24
Wondered about in Sackcloth, Destitute	Elijah	1 Kings 19:13, 19
	Elisha	2 Kings 2:12-15
	Other Prophets	Zech. 13:4
	Isaiah	Isaiah 20:2
Lived in Deserts, Caves	100 prophets	1 Kings 18:4, 13
	Elijah	1 Kings 19:9
	David	1 Samuel 24:1-4

	John the Baptist	Prologue, June 24
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God, the Judge of All
Spirits of Just Men Made Perfect
Jesus, the Mediator
The Blood that Speaks Better than Abel's

This list describes how we are perfected with the saints, prophets and patriarchs of the past. We join together with them as we all join in the worship of the Lamb around the Throne of God. And we get a glimpse of those who have gone before through the windows of heaven (the icons).

The Accomplishments of the Saints

The Epistle lesson concludes with a much-quoted word of encouragement. "Since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith. Who for the joy set before Him endured the Cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the Right Hand of the Throne of God" (Hebrews 12:1-2).

The "Cloud of Witnesses" is also referred to as "the communion of saints" in the Apostles' Creed. These are described as "surrounding us." This occurs as the Church meets to worship her Lord where she joins with the saints in heaven in doing so. To help us see this, a number of icons (paintings) of various saints are displayed on the inner walls of Orthodox Churches. These become like "windows" into heaven to give us a visual impression of the great number of people who have gone before us and whom the prophets also speak of as witnesses. These are called the "One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church" in the Nicene Creed.

All this is intended as a motivation for us to imitate them. We are encouraged to "lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us" (Hebrews 12:1). We are also encouraged to imitate the Lord and "fix our eyes on Jesus, who for the joy set before Him endured the Cross, despising the shame" (Hebrews 12:2). As He was rewarded, so will we be.

John Chrysostom commented⁴³ on this to say that he feels in awe of them and their accomplishments:

"At all times, but especially when I reflect upon the achievements of the saints, it comes over me to feel despondency concerning my own condition. We have not even in dreams experienced the things among which those men spent their whole lives: not paying the penalty of sins, always doing rightly and yet always afflicted. For consider Elijah and that which befell the Apostles⁴⁴. Elijah suffered the same thing with them (2 Kings 1:8) and also the Son of Man who 'had nowhere to lay His head' (Matthew 8:20).

"Do you see that we have the advantage over them? For God has provided some better thing for us (Hebrews 11:40). In order that they might not seem to have the advantage from being crowned before us, He appointed one time for

⁴³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, XXVIII, 1.

⁴⁴ See for example, 1 Corinthians 4:11; 2 Corinthians 11:23-28, 12:7; Philippians 1:12; 2 Timothy 3:11.

crowning for all; and he that gained the victory so many years before receives his crown with you. Do you see His tender carefulness?"

Clement of Rome, who was martyred by drowning⁴⁵ in the Black Sea, wrote⁴⁶ that the martyrs before him inspire the Church to peace.

"The humility and godly submission of so great and illustrious men have rendered not only us, but also all the generations before us, better, as many as have received His oracles in fear and truth. Having so many great and glorious examples set before us, let us turn again to the practice of that peace, which from the beginning was the mark set before us. Let us look steadfastly to the Father and Creator of the universe, and cling to His mighty and surpassingly great gifts and benefits of peace. Let us contemplate Him with our understanding, and look with the eyes of our soul to His long-suffering will. Let us reflect how free from wrath He is towards all His creation."

Chrysostom also stated⁴⁷ that it is useful to think of the saints before us when we are tempted or when we are suffering at the hands of wicked men.

"Let us too consider these things in our temptations, when we suffer anything from wicked men, 'looking to the Beginner and Finisher of our faith' (Hebrews 12:2), and considering that it is by wicked men, and that it is for virtue's sake, and for His sake. For if we reflect on these things, all will be easy and tolerable. Since if someone suffering for those he loves is proud of it, what feeling of things dreadful will he have who suffers for the sake of God? For if He, for our sake, calls that shameful thing, the Cross, 'glory' (Hebrews 12:2), much more ought we to think this way. And if we can so despise sufferings, much more shall we be able to despise riches and covetousness. When about to endure anything unpleasant, we ought to think not of the labors but of the crowns. Just as merchants take into account not only the danger of the seas, but also the profits from the goods transported, so we ought to take into account the benefits of heaven and confidence towards God.

If getting excess profits seems a pleasant thing, think that Christ does not will it, and immediately it will appear displeasing. If it is difficult for you to give to the poor, don't think of the expense, but transport your thoughts to the harvest, which results from the sowing. When it is hard to reject the love of a strange woman, think of the crown, which comes after the struggle, and you shall easily bear the struggle. If fear diverts a man from inappropriate things, much more should the love of Christ.

Chrysostom compared⁴⁸ the lives of the saints to that of their Master. As He was treated, so they will be treated in the future and so they were treated in the past. He is author and finisher, and there is an irrational hostility of the world toward Him, toward the saints and toward us as we follow Him.

⁴⁵ Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, November 25.

⁴⁶ Clement of Rome, First Epistle to the Corinthians, 19.

⁴⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXXVII, 4.

⁴⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, XXVIII, 4, 5.

“The sum and substance of his exhortation, which he puts both first and last, speaks of Christ. ‘Looking to Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our Faith’ (Hebrews 12:2). Christ Himself said this continually to His disciples, ‘If they have called the Master of the house Beelzebub, how much more them of His household?’ And again, ‘The disciple is not above his Master, nor the servant above his Lord’ (Matthew 10:24-25). We ‘look’ (he says), that we may learn to run. For as in all arts and games, we impress the art upon our mind by looking to our masters. We receive certain rules through our sight; so here also, if we wish to run, and to learn to run well, let us look to Christ, ‘the author and finisher of our faith’ (Hebrews 12:2). What is this? He has put the Faith within us. For He said to His disciples, ‘You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you’ (John 15:16). Paul too says, ‘But then shall I know, even as also I have been known’ (1 Corinthians 13:12). He put the Beginning into us, He will also put on the End.”

“Christ was continually a fugitive, sometimes in Galilee, and sometimes in Judea. Was not His trial great, even from the swaddling clothes? When He was yet a young child, His mother took Him and went down into Egypt. For all these reasons Paul says, ‘Looking to 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’ (Hebrews 12:2). Let us look to Him then, also to the sufferings of His disciples. Paul says, ‘In much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonment’ (2 Corinthians 6:4, 5). And again, ‘Even to this present hour, we both hunger, thirst, are naked, are beaten up, and have no certain dwelling-place; we labor, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it; being defamed, we entreat’ (1 Corinthians 4:11-13). Has any one of us suffered the smallest part of these things? For, he says, we are ‘As deceivers, as dishonored, as having nothing’ (2 Corinthians 6:8-10). And again, ‘From the Jews five times I received 39 stripes; three times I was beaten with rods, once was I stoned, a night and a day have I been adrift in the deep; in journeys often, in tribulations, in distress, in hunger’ (2 Corinthians 11:24-27). And that these things seem good to God, hear him saying, ‘For this I sought the Lord three times, and He said to me, My Grace is sufficient for you; for My strength is made perfect in weakness’. ‘Therefore’, he says, ‘I take pleasure in infirmities, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonment, that the power of Christ may rest upon me’ (2 Corinthians 12:8-10). Moreover, hear Christ Himself saying, ‘In the world you shall have tribulation’” (John 16:33).

We Imitate the Captain of Our Salvation

Gregory of Nyssa described⁴⁹ Baptism as imitating the Captain of our salvation in His passage through death. By our penitence, we advance to a hatred of sin; by our identification with His death in the water, we work out a kind of break in the continuity of the evil. By doing so, our Captain leads us out of the labyrinth of death, and trains us like a drillmaster trains new recruits. In Baptism, the water imitates the earth (i.e. burial), and sin flows away to purify both soul and body at our death.

⁴⁹ Gregory of Nyssa, “The Great Catechism”, *Apologetic Works*, IV, 35.

“The descent into the water at Baptism, and the triple immersion of the person in it, involves another mystery, because He has made fellowship with man a real possibility. Because He assumed and deified the flesh (2 Peter 1:4), everything related may be saved along with it. The baptismal process was devised as a kind of likeness between him who follows and Him Who leads the way. We need to see what the Author of our life did, in order that we may imitate the pattern of the Captain of our salvation” (Hebrews 2:10, 12:2).

“Those who are drilled into orderly movements by skilled drillmasters advance in handling their weapons by what they see with their eyes. He who does not practice what is shown him does not obtain such dexterity. In the same way we who desire for the Good as He has, must exactly imitate Him, Who leads the way to salvation, and carry into action what He has shown us. It is impossible to reach the same goal unless we travel by the same ways. Our life is like a labyrinth, which cannot be threaded by the faculties of human nature unless a man pursues that same path as He did. As we thread the turns of mazes, if we happen to fall in with someone who has experience with them, we can get to the end of those various misleading turnings in the chambers by following behind him. The labyrinth is that prison of death, which is without an exit and which surrounds the wretched race of mankind. The Captain of our salvation had a three-days’ state of death and then life again! Some sort of resemblance in us to such things has to be planned”.

“Everything about death has its proper place, namely the earth in which it is buried. Now earth and water have much affinity. They are similar in weight; earth absorbs water, and water can contain earth as slurry; they are mutually confined. The Author of our life was buried in earth; we imitate that death in the neighboring element (water). He, that Man from above (John 3:31, 1 Corinthians 15:47), who took deadness on Himself, was deposited in the earth, and returned back to life the third day. So everyone who is knitted to Him can look forward to the same successful issue: arriving at life by having water poured on him instead of earth. Submitting to water represents for us in the three movements⁵⁰, the three-days-delayed grace of the resurrection”.

“Death has been introduced as a dispensation into the nature of man. Sin flowed away at our death, and we are refashioned, sound, passionless, stainless, and removed from any touch of evil through the resurrection. In the case of the Author of our Salvation (Hebrews 5:9), this dispensation of death reached its fulfillment and accomplished its special purpose. In His death, our soul and body, which had been disunited, were brought together again and purified”.

“We do not admit to an exact imitation in following this Leader, but we receive as much as we are capable of receiving, while the remainder comes after. Our imitation consists in the suppression of that mixture of sin, in the figure of death that is given by the water, not a complete cancellation, but a kind of break in the continuity of the evil. Two things concur to this removal of sin: (1) the penitence of the transgressor, where he acquires a hatred of and aversion from sin; and (2) his imitation of the death, where he works out the suppression of the evil.

⁵⁰ The “three movements” refers to the ancient tradition in the Baptismal rite of immersion three times.

By these two things the man is in a measure freed from his congenital tendency to evil”.

“Had it been possible in his imitation to undergo a complete dying, the result would not be imitation but identity. The evil of our nature would so entirely vanish that, as Paul said ‘he would die to sin once for all’ (Romans 6:10). But since we only imitate the transcendent Power as much as the poverty of our nature is capable of, by having the water thrice poured on us and ascending again up from the water, we enact that burial and resurrection which took place on the third day. As we have power over the water both to be in it and arise out of it, so He too, Who has the universe at His sovereign disposal, immersed Himself in death, as we in the water, to return to His own blessedness”.

Gregory of Nazianzen stated⁵¹ that the Bishops are like physicians who heal both body and soul. They deal primarily with the hidden man of the soul, and that this is in harmony with the Law, the Prophets and the work of Christ. They do this willingly even though they are badly mistreated by the world around them.

“Our office as physicians far exceeds in labor that which is confined to the body. The body is mainly concerned with the surface, and only in a small degree investigates the causes, which are deeply hidden. But the whole of our treatment is concerned with the hidden man of the heart (1 Peter 3:4), and our warfare is directed against that adversary within us, who uses ourselves as his weapons against ourselves. Most fearful of all, he hands us over to the death of sin. In opposition to these foes we are in need of great faith, and of still greater cooperation on the part of God. We need no slight counter maneuvering on our own part, if we are to be cleansed, and this must display itself both in word and deed.”

“Our healing preserves the health and good habit of the flesh, or if absent, recalls it. The scope of our art is to provide the soul with wings, to rescue it from the world and give it to God, and to watch over that which is in His image (Genesis 1:26). We take it by the hand, if it is in danger, or restore it, if ruined, to make Christ to dwell in the heart (Ephesians 3:17) by the Spirit; and to deify one who belongs to the heavenly host.”

“This is the wish of our schoolmaster (Galatians 3:24) the Law, of the prophets who intervened between Christ and the Law, and of Christ who is the fulfiller and end (Hebrews 12:2) of the spiritual law. This is also the wish of the emptied Godhead (Philippians 2:7), of the assumed flesh (Hebrews 2:14), of the novel union between God and man, one consisting of two. This is why God was united to the flesh by means of the soul; natures so separate were knit together by Christ’s human soul.”

“This is why the new was substituted for the old (Hebrews 8:8-13), why He Who suffered was recalled to life. This is why the heathen rage and the peoples imagine vain things (Psalm 2:1 LXX); why one tree is compared to another tree⁵², hands against hand, the one stretched out in self indulgence⁵³, the

⁵¹ Gregory Nazianzen, *Defense of His Flight to Pontus*, II, 21-25.

⁵² That is, the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in the Garden (Genesis 3:3) versus the tree of the Cross (John 19:17).

others in generosity; the one unrestrained, the others fixed by nails (Matthew 27:35), the one expelling Adam (Genesis 3:23-24), the other reconciling the ends of the earth” (2 Corinthians 5:18-20).

⁵³ “Self Indulgence” refers to the attempt of Adam and Eve to explain away their sin (Genesis 3:6-23), rather than repent of it.