

The Three Hierarchs

Epistle: Hebrews 13:7-16 (AV): *Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation. Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever. Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines. For it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace; not with meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein. We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle. For the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without the camp. Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach. For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come. By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name. But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.*

What connects the feast of the Three Hierarchs of the church to this verse is what Paul mentioned in the beginning of this passage. Paul instructed to obey our leaders and follow their example. "Remember them, which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation." (Hebrews 13:7 AV)

The period when the Three Hierarchs and the fourth century fathers of the church was a delicate time and a turning point in the history of the Church. The

latter radiantly came out of it in glory, as a great ship sailing in the oceans of this century, without fear, taking upon it the message of peace.

Before the fourth century, the Church was that of ordinary fishermen, hiding underground. She was the Church of small groups with hidden wisdom, so that through her God put to shame the wisdom of the proud...

When the state was Christianized, the issue was if the church now can handle leading this whole large world, after she was in the world the weak one. The turning point in the history of the Church in the fourth century was not just a great challenge, but also a threat to the Church. Where are those men who will be the leaders of the empire, preaching to the emperors, leading great powers and nations. Are there in the church of the fishermen such great men for these high positions?

The fathers of the fourth century, especially the Three Hierarchs, took upon themselves the challenge of this hard and dangerous mission.

They were leading examples, as stars illuminating the universe. They were men of Spirit and knowledge. Their unique position is that they sailed not in the small boat of the Church, but in the great ship, taking the Church to the safe shore.

The Church today is free, and the religious freedom in every place is not a lesser opportunity than that of the time of Constantine's edict. And the question again comes back to us. Where are those leaders who will take upon themselves this responsibility of guiding their church? Where are the priests who will converse with

scientist or a minister, or any other important personality, making the latter feel that he is his father? Where is the clergyman who will be able to lead and guide the societies that surround him? Where is the preacher that people love to hear? Where is the Church that attracts people to Her? Where are we from the spiritual path of Basil, and the theology of Gregory, and the preaching of Chrsyostom?

If we desire, let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach (Heb 13:14). What reproach? The reproach from the hardship of practicing virtue. Let us go forth, from and to where? From ourselves, our habits, our desires that sucks us towards ourselves, from our own benefits and egoistic mentality. To where? To a new life, the life of the traveler to the city "to come." And how? As the epistle passage explains, "Let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name" (Heb 13:15).

This is the weapon of the Christian, and this was the weapon of our fathers, the Three Hierarchs, "That we always offer a sacrifice of praise," which means that we always remember the Word of God and fervently praise Him. We are earthen vessels, and as much as we have the Word of God abiding in us, as much as we will be filled with, and be carrying, the Divine Grace.

Using the Jesus prayer and making ourselves present in God every moment are two spiritual exercises needed for us if we want to be men for the Church.

We who are being formed in this Faculty of Theology have been uniquely blessed with many things. So let us always exercise ourselves, both spiritually and

practically, on the repetition of the beautiful Name, on standing up, on walking and studying in the divine presence, so that we come out of our desires and our laziness. And go forth to Him, carrying the labor of virtue. God is wondrous in His saints. We have to be for Him and to Him trumpets of the Word, obeying them which have the rule over us following their example of faith, going forth always unto Him.

Amen.