

SERMON FOR ALL SAINTS' SUNDAY (JUNE 14TH 2020) FOR READING

Today, the Sunday of All Saints, brings us to the end of a journey we began almost five months ago. We set out at the end of January as we heard the story of Christ's recognition of Zacchaeus' potential for a reintegration into society, and of the tax collector's response in repentance and generosity. This led us into the time of the Triodion, the Lenten service book. As we heard of recognition and confession of our fallen, needy state (Sunday of the Tax Collector and the Pharisee), the love and forgiveness of God when we return to him (Sunday of the Prodigal Son) and the challenge to see and serve Christ in the poor and disadvantaged around us (Sunday of the Last Judgement) we were prepared for our own entry into the Great Fast through the doorway of mutual forgiveness. During Lent we were asked to consider the truth of our faith, the message of the Cross, and the ascetic work of those who had gone before us, both men and women, and so to follow the Lord to his life-giving and voluntary passion, death and resurrection.

As we emerged into the light of Easter we had three Sundays (Easter, Thomas' Sunday and the Sunday of the Myrrhbearers) to contemplate the new life and joy brought to the world, and three more Sundays (of the Paralysed Man, the Samaritan Woman and the Blind Man) where we heard Gospel stories in which water played a prominent symbolic role, reminding us of the cleansing and life-giving work of Baptism and of the Holy Spirit. The celebration of the Ascension, in which Christ, in his union with us, raises our human nature to the heavens was followed by our remembrance of the Holy Fathers of the First Council who affirmed the dogma of the full divinity and full humanity of the embodied Word of God; which led us finally to last week's feast – the second of the two greatest feasts of the Church – the birth of the Church of God through the coming of the Holy Spirit to the Apostles at Pentecost.

Today, as we close the Pentecostarion, the book which has shaped our worship all through the Easter period, we contemplate the result of the whole story that we have heard on this journey. The Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life, has descended to purify, to renew and to give life to the whole world, by planting within it the seed of the Church. Since the first Pentecost this seed has been growing into a great tree filling the world, in which even the birds find shelter (Matthew 13:32). As we heard at Easter there are those who have been unwilling to receive the light of Christ, but the hundreds of millions who have received him have also received "power to become children of God, ...born...of the will of God." (John 1:12-13). These are the saints, and we know only a fraction of them by name. When St John saw the redeemed in the Apocalypse and counted the symbolic 144,000 he adds, "I looked again, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages." But, as we are told elsewhere, God's firm foundation bears the inscription, "The Lord knows those who are his." (2 Timothy 2:19) Humans may forget, or simply not know, who the holy ones among them are, but God remembers all, and today is their celebration.

But it is also *our* celebration. Although we cannot gather together this year for the feast, we rejoice in our communion with one another and with all those who have gone before us in the faith. We know that whatever may separate us physically we are all joined together as organs or limbs of the Body of the risen Lord. And we are called to "grow up in every way into...Christ, from whom the whole body..., as each part is working properly, grows in building itself up in love." This love and care for the Body of Christ is our road to sainthood. When God looks at each one of us, he sees the saint he has created us to be – a saint in the making, it is true, but with God's help and grace a saint all the same.

So it is no surprise that having shown us the full story of our destiny over the last five months, the Church calls us to set out once more on a fast, this time having as its goal the celebration of the great leaders of the Church: the chief Apostles Peter and Paul. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, in the love of his Father and through the unity that we all share in the Holy Spirit who is the Lord and giver of life lead us forward through that fast towards the ultimate goal of our calling – our own sharing in the nature of God with all our blessed and holy brothers and sisters. And may we all become the saints that we are in his sight. Amen.