

Date: January 1, 2022

Subject: Sunday of the Fathers

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Congratulations on the start of the New Year. We send fervent prayers to God, asking that the new year brings to an end the pandemic that has been inflicted on us. I also greet you with the approaching joyous celebration of Christ's Nativity

MATTHEW 1:1-25

The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Judas and his brethren;

And Judas begat Phares and Zara of Thamar; and Phares begat Esrom; and Esrom begat Aram;

And Aram begat Aminadab; and Aminadab begat Naasson; and Naasson begat Salmon;

And Salmon begat Booz of Rachab; and Booz begat Obed of Ruth; and Obed begat Jesse;

And Jesse begat David the king; and David the king begat Solomon of her that had been the wife of Urias;

And Solomon begat Roboam; and Roboam begat Abia; and Abia begat Asa;

And Asa begat Josaphat; and Josaphat begat Joram; and Joram begat Ozias;

And Ozias begat Joatham; and Joatham begat Achaz; and Achaz begat Ezekias;

And Ezekias begat Manasses; and Manasses begat Amon; and Amon begat Josias;

And Josias begat Jechonias and his brethren, about the time they were carried away to Babylon:

And after they were brought to Babylon, Jechonias begat Salathiel; and Salathiel begat Zorobabel;

And Zorobabel begat Abiud; and Abiud begat Eliakim; and Eliakim begat Azor;

And Azor begat Sadoc; and Sadoc begat Achim; and Achim begat Eliud;

And Eliud begat Eleazar; and Eleazar begat Matthan; and Matthan begat Jacob;

And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.

So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David until the carrying away into Babylon are fourteen generations; and from the carrying away into Babylon unto Christ are fourteen generations.

[18] Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.

Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a publick example, was minded to put her away privily.

But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.

And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.

Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.

Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife:

And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS

On this Sunday, the last Sunday before the Nativity of Christ, the Church celebrates the memory of the Holy Fathers. These are the people who preserved the Promise of the Savior throughout the many

thousand years of the history of the Old Testament. What was it that motivated them to accomplish this superhuman task? The answer is their faith in God and His Promise that He would send a Savior to reconcile humanity with God and free mankind from the damage of original sin.

Yearly on this Sunday, the Church offers to our attention one of the two Genealogies of our Savior. This one was composed by Apostle Matthew for a special purpose. His motivation was to authenticate that the Savior's family line traces back to Patriarch Abraham. This was crucial because God promised Abraham that the Savior would be born from his line. Without this authentication, the Hebrews would not have accepted that Jesus was in fact the long awaited Savior.

Today, a common complaint that people make is to question why it is necessary to read this boring list of very difficult names. They say that yes, this was important when it was first composed. But, what possible meaning can it have for us now? Well, actually it can be a source of great inspiration to us for several reasons.

First of all, many of the people on this list were great saints. They lived before the descent of the Holy Spirit, who is the source of our spiritual power. Yet they were still able to preserve unwavering faith in God's word. Some of these were at first great sinners who attain holiness through profound repentance.

This list also includes persons who were unrepentant sinners, a fact that can also reveal a comforting truth. It reveals that God is able to take a bad situation and derive great benefit from it. This can strengthen us spiritually when everything around us seems bad and hopeless.

Finally, the inclusion of the names of women is especially significant. Women were never included in Hebrew genealogies. However, the evangelist included four of them. This can provide us with a good response to feminists who attack Christianity for being misogynistic.

Finally, let us look at several of the people in the genealogy to see the important lessons they can teach us about faith.

ABRAHAM. As we discussed last week, he was childless until very old age, but never lost faith in God's promise that he would be given a son through whom the promise of the Savior would be fulfilled. This faith permitted him to show absolute obedience when God ordered him to sacrifice his only son despite the fact that it was through this very son that the promise had to be fulfilled. Abraham firmly believed that if God made this promise, He would fulfill it no matter what.

JACOB was the younger son of Abraham's son, Isaac. As such, God's promise to Abraham did not apply to him but to his older brother, Esau. However, his faith in God's word was so strong and important to him that he tricked his older brother to give over his birthright to him. God permitted this to happen because Esau did not value the honor and responsibility that the birthright placed on him.

KING DAVID reveals to us among other lessons the power of profound repentance. He was guilty of adultery and murder and was condemned to death for these crimes by God. His repentance, however, was so deep and sincere that God forgave him and freed him from his death sentence by giving him a lighter punishment and many great blessings, even during his life.

PROPHET DANIEL AND THE THREE HOLY YOUTHS. Being of noble lineage, they were taken at a very young age as hostages to Babylon. Daniel was eight years old at the time. Despite their tender years, they remained completely faithful to God and refused under pain of death to participate in the pagan religious practices of their captors. And true to His Word, God protected them and rewarded them with

great sanctity. What a powerful witness and encouragement they give to us who today face the growing persecution of Christianity in the world!

RUTH THE MOABITRESS. This woman was a pagan who was married to a Hebrew man. She gives us a great lesson in self-sacrificial love and care for the elderly. When she and her mother-in-law became widows, her mother-in-law decided to leave her home in a pagan country and move back to her own Hebrew country. She urged Ruth to remain in her own country with her own people. But Ruth, knowing how difficult it would be for the old lady to take care of herself, refused and moved with her to a foreign land where, after the death of her mother-in-law, she would be all alone.

ZERUBBABEL. His active faith in life and deeds made him worthy to become a type of the Savior. He moved his people out of slavery and took care at the same time of their spiritual needs by overseeing the rebuilding of the burnt-out Temple in Jerusalem. In this way, he prefigured the Savior who saved all people from slavery to the devil, allowing them to be able to move to the Heavenly Jerusalem.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, as we see, it is not a futile exercise to listen to Christ's genealogies. By familiarizing ourselves with Christ's Old Testament holy saints, we receive great encouragement. Being strengthened in faith by a promise that God made but did not fulfil for many centuries, they persevered and prevented this promise from being forgotten. And they were able to do this without the great spiritual help that is available to people in the New Testament through the descent into the world of the Holy Spirit. Seeing their example, how will we be able to justify ourselves before God if we do not live faithfully according to our vows given to Him at baptism, when we have such great supernatural spiritual support given to us through the Church and the great grace of the Holy Spirit, received through the sacraments?

With Much Love in Christ,
Archpriest Serge Kotar