

Homily

The Prophet Daniel

Prophet for the End of the 20th Century

Sunday before Nativity, December 19, 1999
St. Andrew Orthodox Church - Riverside, Ca.
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Introduction. In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, One God. Amen. Today is the Sunday before Nativity, called the Sunday of the Genealogy of Christ. On this Sunday we commemorate all of the Old Testament righteous in our Savior's genealogical line. Our Gospel text this morning is St. Matthew's record of Jesus' genealogy. It is filled with name after name. It is important to not be bamboozled or confused by the list of names into thinking that this genealogy is unimportant. Genealogies are found at several very important points in Holy Scripture, and often the student of the Bible who is doing his reading is tempted to pass by this lists very quickly without deriving much spiritual benefit or discerning the meaning of the genealogies. Genealogies are not Scriptural filler. The genealogy listed by St. Matthew is of significance. In fact, it is the very way the Spirit of God has willed to open the New Testament. One of the reasons that the genealogy of our Sweetest Lord Jesus Christ opens the New Testament is because found in this genealogy is our fundamental confession of faith in Christ as both God and Man. The genealogy is as much a confession of faith in the Incarnate Christ as it is a record of lineage. This reality is reflected by the fact that the first 17 verses are dedicated to Jesus' human lineage from Abraham through David up to Joseph and Mary. But the genealogy continues in our Gospel lesson with the record of Jesus' divine lineage. As recorded in these verses 18-25 Jesus' conception was not by one of these male ancestors, but miraculously by the Holy Spirit Himself. As the Prophet Isaiah foretold Jesus' birth is the birth of God the Son, for Christ is Emmanuel, "God with us." And so, right at the beginning of the New

Testament St. Matthew's record of Jesus' genealogy proclaims the identity of Christ as One Person, Who exists in two natures, divine and human.

There are yet other rich fruits to be derived from Jesus' genealogy such as to notice the purity of the line, to adore the hand of God's providence in preserving this line, and also to note that this line is not free of scandal, obvious sinners, and much human fallenness. We have names in this genealogical record like Tamar and Judah, David, Uzziah, and Manasseh all of whose names call to mind very serious sins such as adultery, prostitution, murder, and idolatry. Our Lord Jesus did not come to earth to redeem perfect men and women. He came to dwell with sinners and to save them. Though He had every reason to disdain us in our wickedness and hard heartedness He refused to do so. From the conception of the Incarnation in the Divine Mind to its accomplishment on earth in human history, from first to last, the Incarnation is the fruit of God's love for us. "For God so loved the world that He gave His Only-Begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life" (St. Jn. 3:16).

Together with the ancestors of our Savior on this Sunday before the Nativity we commemorate the Holy and Glorious Prophet Daniel and the three holy children who braved the fiery furnace: Ananias, Azarias, and Misael. The Holy Prophet Daniel and these three youths are commemorated on the 17th of December, but also on the two Sundays preceding Nativity. Last year at this time I delivered to you a homily on the man whose memory is as sweet as incense, the supreme zealot and the tenderhearted one, Righteous King Josiah. This morning I bring to a meditation upon the life of the Holy Prophet Daniel.

The Prophet Daniel is the Prophet for Orthodox at the End of the 20th Century. Daniel's life is of great relevance to us believers today. Remember that Daniel lived at a very tumultuous time in the history of Israel. He lived about 600 BC just at the time that Jerusalem was being sacked by the forces of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. The walls of Jerusalem were torn down. Babylon was triumphing throughout the world. Daniel and the three Holy Children were taken captive into exile as young men in their teens. Much like Israel of this period the Church today finds herself in tumult. Our Jerusalem's have been sacked, and we find ourselves in most places in exile, dwelling in lands foreign to our faith. And certainly Babylon is presently triumphing. I am not referring to Iraq. Ever since the time of King Nebuchadnezzar the Church has used "Babylon" as an expression to describe cultures of decadence and sin. This is why St. Peter at the end of his first epistle written from Rome writes that "She who is in Babylon greets you" (1 St. Peter 5:13). And St. John the Theologian in the Revelation describes

the perverse city with the same terminology, “Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots and of the Abominations of the Earth” (17:5).

Lessons from the Life of the Prophet Daniel. We would do well to observe closely the life of Daniel. As he did for the Jews of his time he for us offers a model of fidelity to God in a period of moral chaos, Babylonian ascendancy, and exile. **The first lesson we derive from Daniel’s life is the call to courage.** The Prophet Daniel was a brave heart. He was led away from his home as a youth, and yet he did not cower in fear. As a youth he defied the impious orders of kings, boldly approached his masters, and exhibited in his life only one prevailing fear: the fear of God. This courage is witnessed throughout Daniel’s life. Daniel courageously interpreting the King’s dream though his life and the life of many others was on the line. Daniel courageously rebuking King Belshazzar for his sins, for drinking from the holy vessels of God’s temple, and boldly interpreting the mystic writing of the hand on the wall foreshadowing Belshazzar’s doom the next day. And that courage manifested by Daniel in that famous incident in which he defied the king’s impious law forbidding prayer to God. For this Daniel was thrown into the den of lions where he courageously dwelt as a shepherd amongst sheep. What we Orthodox need today is courage. Courage to remain faithful to God regardless of the consequences. Courage to trust God no matter the difficulty. Especially as Daniel was courageous as a young man our youth need the same courage. Without courage youth of today have little chance of remaining faithful to God. **The second lesson we derive from Daniel’s life is the call to conviction.** There is an interesting note in the first chapter of Daniel’s prophecy. It reads as follows, “Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself” (v. 8). Once Daniel arrived in Babylon the King gave him three intense years of tutoring in the language and literature of the Chaldeans. **Due to Daniel’s conviction in the midst of this “Babylonian education” he retained a Christian mind.** We see him throughout his life saturated in prayer and in the reading of Holy Scripture. It was from deep study of the Prophecy of Jeremiah that Daniel discerned Israel’s release from captivity and return from exile. We live also in an era of intense “Babylonian” indoctrination. The materialistic culture around us is fanatic about promoting its worldview. There is a catechism going on at all times in our society and it isn’t St. John Chrysostom’s school. It is “Satan’s Catechetical School of Sin” and it is very well organized, very well funded, and very well attended. Sadly, it is also very well

attended even by Orthodox. Our televisions and VCRs are more often than not small outposts and teaching centers of this demonic school, as well as popular culture, movies, much of what happens in the public schools, and these days the White House itself. We need Daniel's conviction to retain a Christian mind. **Due to Daniel's conviction in a materialist Babylonian culture he maintained his simplicity.** He refused the King's fine wine and food, and was resolved to maintain the fast of the Old Testament Church at any cost. He lived in the royal court, but subsisted on vegetables. King Darius beautifully described Daniel's mentality as he called down into the lion's den and said, "Daniel, you *Whom you constantly serve* will Himself deliver you"(6:16). In the midst of a selfish culture seeking only its own gratification Daniel *constantly served God*. **Due to Daniel's conviction, in exile he retained his faith in the ultimate triumph of God's kingdom.** Daniel refused to become depressed or despairing even though outwardly everything looked bleak for God's people. He took his cue not from external circumstances but from God's promises. He knew that the stone which had been hewn without hands from the mountain in Nebuchadnezzar's dream and had completely shattered the statue represented the victory of the Kingdom of Christ over all the Kingdoms of this world. We too must remember our Savior's precious promises to the Church and the victory which is ours now and will be ours on the great day which is coming. **Due to Daniel's conviction, in the face of unjust persecution he remained unflinchingly faithful to his Lord.** Even when his life was threatened with the lion's den if he was caught maintaining his prayer rule of kneeling three times a day facing Jerusalem he refused to compromise. He considered life without prayer to be no life at all. Life without prayer is not worth living. And so we defied the King, he defied the police, he defied the lions, he defied death itself! And was victorious. Is this how we view our prayers? Do we take our rule of prayer like this? Second to nothing?

The Holy and Glorious Prophet Daniel is the Prophet for us Orthodox at the end of the 20th century. His life of courage and conviction is the model for us today. May his prayers be with us, and may it be that we follow in his footsteps of courage and conviction and find ourselves to be numbered with him and enjoying every blessing in the presence of Christ our God Who, according to Daniel's prophecies, soon shall come to judge the world in righteousness. To Him Who supported Daniel in the Lion's den and danced with the Three Holy Youths in the furnace of flame be glory and honor, together with His Unoriginate Father, and His All-Holy, Good and Life-Giving Spirit, always, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.