

HOMILY

# **The Church at the End of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

December 5<sup>th</sup>, 1999      St. Savvas the Sanctified

Fr. Josiah Trenham, Pastor

St. Andrew Orthodox Christian Church; Riverside, Ca.

**Introduction.** In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, One God. Amen. Last Sunday I offered to you some reflections upon the 20<sup>th</sup> century which we are about to leave. I called your attention to the radical changes that have taken place in this century, and especially the satanic nature of much of this century calling your attention to the Scriptural prophecies concerning the “removal of the restrainer” and the “loosing of Satan” just prior to the return of our Lord Jesus Christ to earth to judge the world. My exhortation to all was to prepare for martyrdom and to recognize the signs of the time in which we live. We are being called to demonstrate our loyalty and fidelity to Christ by identifying completely with Him here and now, to accept the cross that he gives us knowing that by our embracing of this cross we shall find eternal life.

**The Church at the End of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.** This morning I would like to speak to you about something even more important than what is going on in the world at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I am speaking to you this morning about something that is going on in the church at this time. It is appropriate that I offer these reflections today on the feast day of St. Savvas the Sanctified, one of the church’s greatest monastic saints. St. Sabbas lived 94 years from approximately 439 AD to 533 AD. He was from Cappadocia, and at eight years of age became a monastic. He became the disciple of the great Euthymius of the Palestinian desert. He became a cave dweller and a accomplished ascetic, and at the age of 40 organized his Great Lavra in Palestine. Over the next 50 or so years he would offer spiritual directions to hundreds and hundreds of monks. He became a light to the entire Orthodox people, and was revered by Emperors and Archbishops.

I say that it is appropriate that I speak to you concerning the state of the Church at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century on the Feast of St. Saba because during his lifetime the Church suffered in great turmoil and inner conflict. This conflict was provoked primarily by the rise of heresy. At the time of St. Savvas the monophysite heresy was raging. The monophysites rejected the teaching of the 4<sup>th</sup> Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon regarding the two natures of our Lord Jesus Christ. They taught that Christ had one divine-human nature, instead of two distinct natures (divine and human) united in His one person. A

story is related of a visit of St. Saba at the end of his life to Constantinople to see the pious Emperor Justinian. During the visit Justinian asked St. Saba to bless the Empress Theodora who was childless. St. Saba blessed her some three separate times but wouldn't pray for her on any of these occasions to have a child. Later he told his disciples that if she had a child the child would renew the heresies in the churches with great vehemence. Empress Theodora had been exceptionally kind to numerous monophysite leaders in Constantinople and St. Saba questioned the stability of her Orthodoxy. At the time of St. Saba, due to the heresies Satan was troubling the Church with, numerous faithful Orthodox Patriarchs, bishops, priest and monastics were unjustly exiled for politically incorrect fidelity to the Orthodox faith.

The Church this century has suffered similar sorrows. In many ways this century has been the most glorious for the Church but in many ways it has also been a grievous century.