

23 Δεκεμβρίου 2018

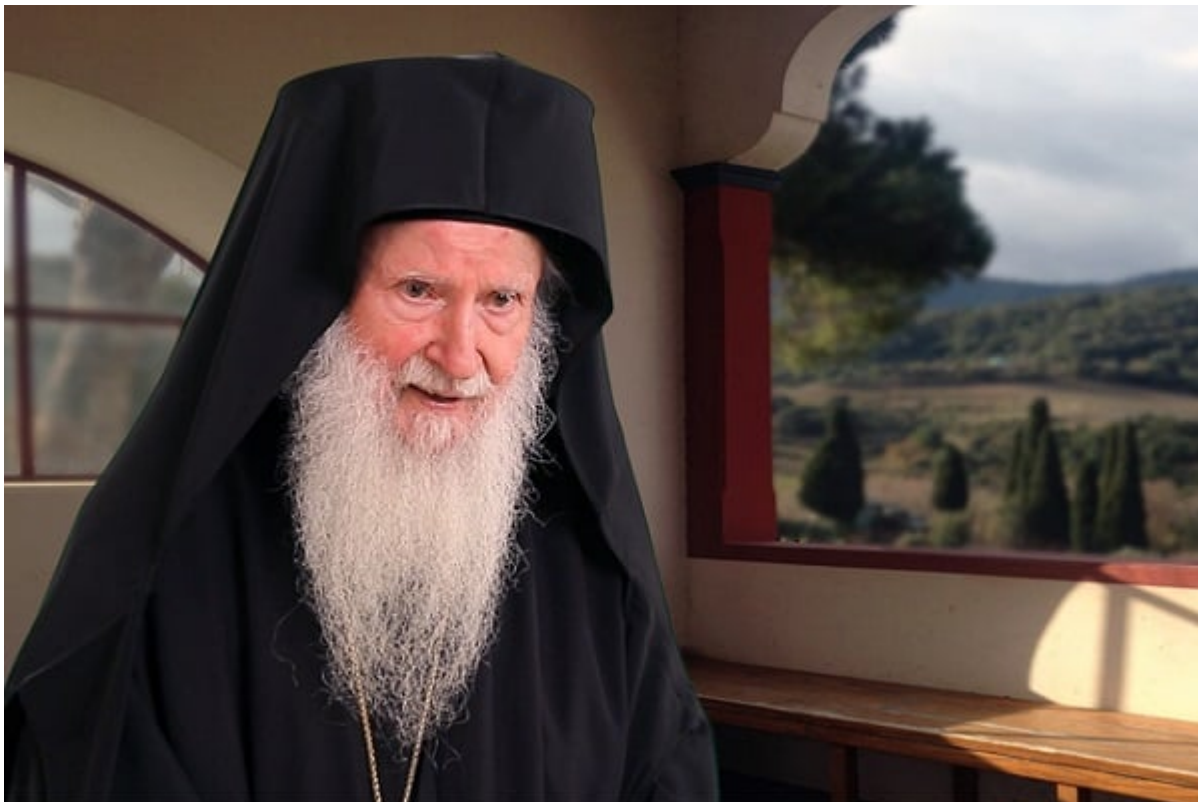
Sermon for the Apostolic Reading on the Sunday before Christmas (Hebrews 11: 9-10 & 32-40) (Metropolitan of Pisidia Sotirios)

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)



In today's Apostolic Reading, we heard with how much faith Abraham and his descendants obeyed the voice of God and with great certainty and patience they waited for the promise He had given them to be fulfilled.

Abraham is called by God to leave relatives and his home country, everything, in order to move and relocate to an unknown land. God does not reveal to him which land he has destined him for. Instead, He simply tells him to “leave” and “I will show you the place where you shall be settled.” Abraham does not question God about this land he will be dwelling in, but shows complete trust in Him like a child holding tightly the hand of his father. In due time, he reaches the land shown to him by God. A stranger in an unknown place. Where will he settle his family? There were no houses anywhere. They set up tents and lived there with Isaac his son, Jacob his grandson, and all of his family (verse 9). Life in tents, as one can imagine, was not easy at all.



But what exactly was it that gave strength to Abraham in order to face this kind of suffering with such decisiveness and a peaceful soul? The answer is given to us by the Apostle Paul: “for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (verse 10). Because this is what God had promised him, and in that he had no doubt. He knew that he would be residing there only temporarily, and as a result he was not troubled about lacking comforts. Abraham steadily looked ahead to his permanent homeland, the heavenly City. This vision of the Kingdom of God gave Abraham and his descendants who followed him, the courage, patience and resilience to deal with the difficulties of this life with courage and optimism.

Truly, we Christians have the clearest promises of God from the infallible mouth of our Lord and God Jesus Christ. In the difficulties we face, are we thinking of the permanent homeland we will inherit? The Apostle Paul reminds us: "For we do not have a permanent homeland here, but desire and seek the future one" (Hebrews 13:14). Whatever sorrows there may be are only for a short time. This is exactly what the Christian martyrs believed, who had in front of them the vision of Heavenly Paradise! And so they courageously endured tortures, an example being the 40 Martyrs. They threw them naked into a frozen lake in Sebaste in the middle of winter, in order for them to slowly freeze to death. They gave courage to one another, saying: "Harsh is the winter but sweet is Paradise."

How much strength can we gather in times of hardship, when we remember the words of the Apostle Paul: "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18). If we manage to keep our eyes focused on our future and eternal homeland, then our temporary lives here will also be beautiful, under the protection and grace of God.

I would also like turn our attention to a revelation that the Apostle Paul makes in today's passage we have just heard. Abraham, with all the Righteous and Prophets that came before Christ, had received the good word that their faith had pleased God, but did not get to enjoy in their time what the Lord had promised them: Namely, salvation and the heavenly homeland (verse 39). Salvation would be given to them by the coming of Christ the Messiah on earth and His incarnation. Their release from the bonds of death would occur with the death and Resurrection of Christ. For that purpose they were eagerly awaiting the day of the birth of Christ. Thus Christmas is of great significance and a redeeming event, not only for us today but for all those who have lived before Christ with absolute faith in God, as all those mentioned by the Apostle Paul today. All the Prophets and Righteous People of the Old Testament, have been incorporated into the triumphant Church of Christ and share the gifts of God together with our Most Holy Theotokos, the Holy Apostles and all the Saints. God wanted, as the Apostle Paul writes, that all the Righteous who came before and we who believed in Christ, be all together in one spiritual body to enjoy redemption. Now, as a foretaste of what is to come, then in the Second Coming of our Lord to inherit the reward of the Kingdom of our Lord which He has promised us.

So let us appropriately prepare, my brothers and sisters, to receive the holy babe Jesus and together with the heavenly Angels chant: "Glory to God in the Highest."