

HOMILY EIGHT - ON FAITH INCLUDING AN EXPOSITION OF OUR DEVOUT CONFESSION

BELIEVING IN GOD IS DIFFERENT from believing God. To believe God is to regard His promises to us as sure and true, but to believe in Him is to have a right understanding of Him. Both are necessary for us and we must speak correctly in both respects, in such a way that people with correct understanding can be confident that we are faithful before the God to Whom our faith is directed and that, being faithful, we shall be justified by Him. "Abraham believed God", it says, "and it was counted unto Him for righteousness" (Rom. 4:3, Gen. 15:6, cf. Gal. 3:6, Jas. 2:23). Why was Abraham counted as righteous because he believed? He had received a promise from God that in his seed, that is, in Isaac, all the tribes of Israel would be blessed (Gen. 17:16; cf. 26:3-5, 24). Then he was commanded by God to sacrifice Isaac (Gen. 22:1), through whom alone the promise could be fulfilled (Gen. 17:21; 21:12), while he was still a child. "Without contradicting he, the father, was hastening on his way to become his son's murderer while at the same time regarding the promise concerning his son as infallibly sure (Gen. 22:1-18).

2. Do you see what sort of faith brings justification? But Christ also promised us that we would inherit eternal life, pleasure, glory and the kingdom, while then He commanded us to be poor, to fast, to live in lowliness and affliction, to be ready to die and to crucify ourselves together with our passions and desires (cf. Gal. 5:24). If therefore we eagerly do these things while at the same time believing God's promise to us, then we shall have really believed God in the way Abraham did, and it will be counted to us as righteousness.

3. Notice the consequence of these events. The fact that Abraham agreed to offer Isaac for slaughter was not just powerful evidence and proof of his faith. Because of it Christ, through Whom all the tribes of the earth were blessed and the promise was fulfilled (Gen. 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; cf. 26:4-5), was born of Abraham's seed (Matt. 1:1-16). It was as if God was under an obligation to the man who gave his only-begotten true son for His sake, to give him in return His only-begotten True Son for his sake and the sake of the promise made to him. It is exactly the same in our case. If because of God's commandments we are chaste, righteous, humble, patiently submit to every kind of evil-doing and share out our possessions, if we submit our bodies to hardship through fasts and vigils, if, in a word, we crucify ourselves together with our passions and desires (cf. Gal. 5:24), this is not just proof that we truly believe Christ's promises, but it also, as it were, obliges God to give us in return eternal and incorruptible life and pleasure, glory and the kingdom.

4. Christ looked at His disciples and said, "Blessed are ye poor: for yours is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye that mourn. Blessed are ye merciful. Blessed are ye that are persecuted for righteousness' sake" (Matt. 5:3-4, 7, 10). But "woe unto you that are rich. Woe unto you that laugh. Woe unto you that are full. Woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you" (Luke 6:24-26). How, I ask you, is it credible that someone believes God if he does not aspire to what the Lord pronounces blessed but to what He

pronounces wretched? “Shew me”, it says, “thy faith by thy works” (Jas. 2:18). And, “Who is a wise man? let him shew out of good conduct his works” (Jas. 3:13).

5. The fact that we truly believe God, that we understand that His promises and warnings to us are true and sure, even though they have not happened yet, is shown by our good works and by our keeping of His commandments. But what proof is there that we have a right belief in God, that we have a trustworthy and devout understanding of Him? It is that we confess the same faith as our God-bearing Fathers. Sincerely believing God provokes opposition not only from the physical passions and the evil one’s snares, but also from people in the grip of passions who lure others and drag them down with themselves into wicked pleasures. In the same way, having a right belief in the one true God provokes opposition not only from ignorance and the enemy’s promptings, but also from godless men who treacherously pull believers down into the depths of their own destruction. In both aspects of faith our greatest help comes not just from God Himself and our God-given faculty of knowledge, but from the good angels and from God-fearing people who live according to His will.

6. This is why the Church of Christ, the spiritual Mother and Nurse of us all, clearly and publicly celebrates today those who were illustrious in their piety and virtue, their holy Councils and the godly doctrines these Councils proclaimed. At the same time the Church briefly denounces the supporters of ungodliness and their evil pursuits and purposes, so that we can turn away from them, follow those whose understanding accords with God’s intention, and believe in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, from Whom and through Whom and in Whom all things were made; Who is before all things and over all things and in all things and beyond all things, Unity in Trinity, Trinity in Unity, united without confusion, undividedly divided, Almighty Unity and Almighty Trinity.

7. The Father is timeless, without beginning and pre-eternal. He is the sole cause and root of the divinity beheld in the Son and the Holy Spirit; not the sole Creator, but the sole Father of the only Son and the sole producer of the one Holy Spirit. He is forever, He is the Father forever, and He is the sole Father and the sole Producer forever.

8. His one Son is co-eternal with Him. Like Him, the Son is without beginning in time, but inasmuch as He has the Father as begetter, root, source and origin, He is not without beginning [meaning source, not time PM.]. Before all ages He alone was begotten of Him without a body, without passion or change, and was not divided from Him. Being God from God, He is not one thing as God and another as Son. He is forever, He is the Son forever and He is with the Father forever without confusion. He is the living Word, the true light, the enhypostatic Wisdom, cause and origin of all created things, for by Him all things were made. When the fullness of the ages had come (cf. Gal. 4:4), as the prophets foretold, He emptied Himself, took our human form for our sake, was conceived by the ever-virgin Mary through the gracious will of the Father and the co-operation of the Holy Spirit, and was conceived and was born. He was truly made man and became like us in everything apart from sin (cf. Heb. 4:15), while remaining true God in one person even after His incarnation. He acted as God in all divine matters, as man in all human matters, subjecting Himself to such human

passions as are blameless. Although as God He was and remained above suffering and immortal, as man He chose to suffer in the flesh for our sake, to be crucified, to die and to be buried. He rose again on the third day and by His death and resurrection He destroyed him that had the power of death. After the resurrection He showed Himself, ascended into heaven and sat down at the right hand of the Father, sharing the same honor and throne with Him, thereby making our nature equal with God. He will come once more in glory with this same human substance to judge the living and the dead brought back to life by the power of His coming, and He will repay each one according to his works. Knowing that what He assumed from us is both visible and circumscribed, we devoutly portray and reverence the Virgin who gave Him birth and those who have been perfectly pleasing to Him. We honor and reverence the symbols of His sufferings, especially the Cross, as divine trophies of victory over our common enemy. Day by day we commemorate Him as He commanded, consecrate the Holy Gifts and partake of them. First of all, in accordance with His commandment we are baptized and baptize others into the one honorable, adored name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

9. From the eternal Father Who is without beginning the Holy Spirit also proceeds. As timeless He is together with the Father and the Son without beginning, but He is not without beginning, inasmuch as He has the Father as root, origin and cause, from Whom He proceeded before all ages, without passion or change. He was not divided from the Father or the Son when He came from the Father and rested in the Son, for He was united with Them without confusion and indivisibly distinct. Being also God from God, He is not one thing as God and another as Comforter, inasmuch as He is the hypostatic existence of the Holy Spirit. He has His existence from the Father and is sent through the Son, as the first fruits of eternal life and the earnest of the everlasting good things to come. He too is the cause of all created things, for in Him all things were made. He does not differ from the Father and the Son except that He is neither unbegotten nor begotten. He was sent by the Son to His disciples, that is to say, He was made known to them by the Son, for this is the only sense in which He could be sent Who is everywhere present and does not leave the Sender. He is sent by the Father as well as the Son, and also comes on His own behalf, for sending, that is to say revelation, is the common work of the Father, the Son and the Spirit.

10. He is not revealed, however, in His essence, for nobody has ever seen or declared God's nature, but in the grace, power and energy common to the Father, Son and Spirit. Each has His own hypostasis, and the characteristics seen to belong to that hypostasis. They have in common not only Their undisclosed essence, which is above all names and in which we cannot share, but also the grace, power, energy, radiance, incorruption, kingdom, and everything else by which God has communion with the holy angels and with men. He is united with them through grace without losing His unity and simplicity either by the division and difference between the hypostases, or the diversity and variety of the divine powers and energies. So we believe in one God, in one tri-hypostatic and all-powerful Godhead, we celebrate those who have pleased God with such a faith, and we reject those who, instead of holding this faith, either started their own heresies or followed others who started them. You should be aware, brethren, that

evil passions and godless doctrines open the door to one another, finding their place once God has had reason to depart.

11. The Great Paul teaches us that ungodliness makes room for a dense swarm of sins when he writes of the Greeks, "As they did not like to retain God in their knowledge" (Rom. 1:28), "but when they knew God, they glorified him not as God neither honored him" (cf. Rom. 1:21), "God gave them over to a reprobate mind to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, covetousness and the like" (Rom. 1:28). The fact that sin opens the door to ungodliness is proved by the many wretched people who suffered in the way. When Solomon had surrendered himself to physical pleasures he slid into idolatry (2 Kgs. 11:1-6). Once Jeroboam had been utterly overcome by love of power he sacrificed to the golden calves (2 Kgs. 10:29, cf. 2 Chr. 13:8). And Judas the traitor, sick with love of money, sank to murdering God (Matt. 26:15).

12. Faith without works is dead and chaotic, and works without faith are empty and useless. Today, in this noble season of fasting and virtuous effort, the grace of the Holy Spirit has combined the celebration of those who taught the word of our faith correctly with the denunciation of those who chose to do otherwise. This is so that we, eagerly pursuing both faith and works together, may show our faith by our works and carry off the prize for our labors through faith.

13. Evil passions and godlessness not only open the door to one another, they are also similar. I should like to say a little to your charity about the non-Orthodox believers who have appeared in our day. Adam was given authority by God to eat from every tree in paradise but he was not satisfied with them all. Once he had been convinced by the counsel of the serpent, the originator of evil, he ate from that one tree which he had been commanded not to touch. In the same way God sets before us all His riches and truly beneficial gifts to share if we wish, in accordance with the words, "The person who has been deified by grace will be in every respect as God is, except for His very essence." There are, however, people who teach that we can also share in God's supraessential essence and proclaim that this essence can be authoritatively named. They imitate the serpent, the originator of evil, by misinterpreting and distorting the words of the saints just as he did to the words of God. But we have received power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy. Without difficulty we can crush all the tricks and snares he devises against piety and the devout way of life. And when we have openly gained the victory over him in every respect we shall attain to heavenly and incorruptible crowns of righteousness in Christ Himself, to the impartial Judge Who gives to each his due.

14. To Whom belong all glory, honor and worship, with His Father without beginning and the all-holy, good and life-giving Spirit, now and forever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.