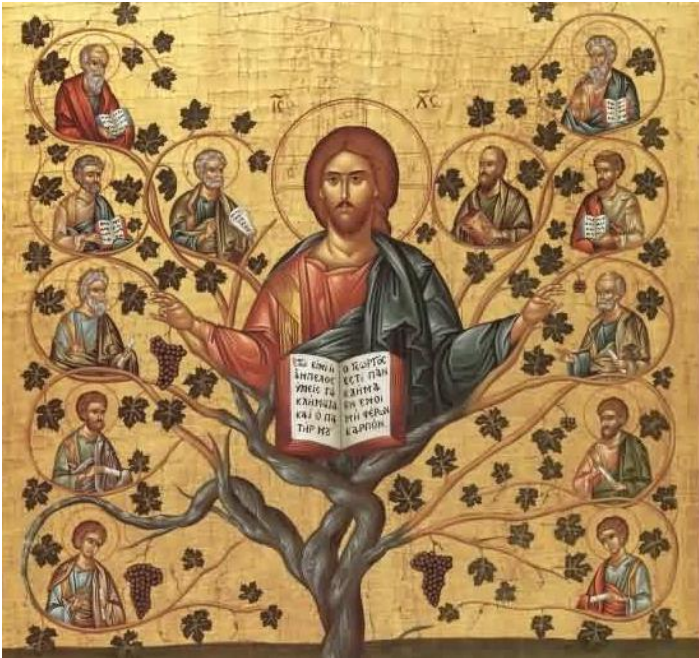


Sunday Before Christmas – Holy Fathers

The Genealogy of Christ

Heb 11:24-26; 32-12:2 & Mt 1: 1-25

Father Deacon Howard



The Sunday before Christmas is consecrated to the preparation for the Nativity. It's called the 'Sunday of the Holy Fathers'. But because the evangelist Matthew records a selection of the basic historical facts of the ancestors of Jesus this Sunday is sometimes called the 'Sunday of Genealogy'. In fact, the 1st verse is a kind of title to Matthew's entire Gospel. "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the son of Abraham."

We have read or heard this genealogy many times. And on reading the list of the Jesus's ancestors we may get the impression that it's of purely historical or documentary interest. In fact, to a modern reader it's boring. But it certainly wasn't boring for Matthew or for a first century Jew who would find it electrifying. Matthew had a very good reason for tracing

back the heritage of Jesus in three stages: A summary of it was read in today's gospel, "So then, there were 14 generations from Abraham to David, and 14 from David to the exile in Babylon, and 14 from then to the birth of the Messiah. (Matt 1:17)."

In other words, there have been six 'sevens' so far ... and now comes the purpose of it all. The seventh seven, the perfect number! Matthew's three step genealogy summarizes all of Israel's history, climaxing in Jesus: Abraham to David, to Isaac, to Jacob an up to Joseph the husband of Mary, of who was born Jesus who is called the Christ, the anointed one of God. Matthew wants his readers to know that there is no separation between the good news of the coming Jesus as the Christ and the Old Testament good news of God's promise to the Jews of a future Messiah.

At the time of Jesus, Jews would fully understand why Matthew would proceed his preaching the "good news", with the Jewish genealogy of Christ. Knowing one's genealogy is of great importance for the Jews, because a person's identity was especially linked to family and tribe. In the case of the Jewish people there was the added religious significance of belonging by blood to the chosen people.

From the get-go Matthew wants to make it abundantly clear to his non-Jewish readers that Jesus of Nazareth, a descendant of David, a descendant of Abraham, who was virginally conceived by Mary, by the working of the Holy Spirit, was the Messiah promised in the Old

Testament prophecies; that he was the Incarnate Son of God, the Savior of mankind, who had come to set the whole world free from the slavery of sin, from the devil and from eternal death.

While the genealogy of our Lord had meaning to the Jews in the first century, what can this list of names bring us today that have any spiritual importance? The first thing is for us not to forget, that each one of these names does have a particular meaning. Each name should remind us of the life of the person mentioned. The point to be made is that the ancestors of Jesus were not all holy upright individuals. Among them were sinners; those who committed incest, adultery, and murder. Of the four women on the list, one would be considered an outsider and three were involved in a colorful event that would shock the puritanical eyes of 21st century ultra-Orthodox Jews. Tamar was a seductress, Rahab was a prostitute and Uriah's wife, Bathsheba, was an adulteress. Ruth was not a Jew; she was a Moabite, a foreigner.

Matthew may have mentioned these women to signify that Jesus arose from all kinds of people and therefore came to suffer for all kinds of people, the sinful as well as the saint, the Gentile as well as the Jew. And that God will sometimes carry out his plan of salvation by means of people whose conduct has not been just. God saves us, sanctifies us and chooses us to do good, despite our sins and infidelities.

The good news of Matthew is that he wanted his community to see that Jesus was the Messiah, the anointed one of God. That Jesus was Emmanuel, God with us. That Jesus was our Lord and Savior who forgives our sins. The good news for us is that Jesus the Son of God by his Incarnation, by the Word being made Flesh, is humanly linked to people with varying degrees of holiness. And so, it is the sinful history of each one of us that Jesus takes upon himself and overcomes by his death on the cross. For each one of us has some of the features of those of Jesus's ancestors who are the furthest from holiness. In each one of us can be found, either dormant or awakened, the sins of our ancestors.

All the same, however, Jesus who was born and laid in a manger 2000 years ago must be born in each one of us today. We must, in ourselves, overcome and go beyond the misdeeds that certain names in the genealogy of Jesus represent. It is necessary for us to live this genealogy, to acquire a personal experience of it, so that through falling in sin and starting afresh in grace we shall eventually reach Joseph and Mary. Thus, the genealogy of Christ will become an integral part of our own lives.

I wish all those watching this Divine Liturgy a healthy and Holy Christmas and a very blessed New Year.

DISCLAIMER "The views and opinions expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Ukrainian Catholic Church.