



## **First Week of the Great Lent**

Today's Gospel reading, dear brethren, tells us of how Philip, who was one of Christ's disciples, brought his friend Nathaniel to Christ. Along the way Nathaniel expressed his doubts to Philip as to whether Christ was truly the Messiah, but after meeting Christ and talking with Him, all of Nathaniel's doubts evaporated. The Lord touched upon the deepest strings of Nathaniel's heart, touched upon his innermost thoughts and desires, thus showing His divine omniscience; and so Nathaniel proclaimed Christ to be the Son of God and became one of His twelve closest disciples.

But why do we hear this Gospel reading about Christ's conversation with Nathaniel on this particular Sunday, the first Sunday of Great Lent, which celebrates the Triumph of Orthodoxy? It is because the Lord's words to Nathaniel clearly describe the character of a true Orthodox Christian and, by extension, the character of the true Orthodox Church.

Here is truly an Israelite, – said the Lord of Nathaniel, – in whom there is no guile; i.e. here is a man who thinks, reasons, believes, hopes, talks, and acts rightly and directly, – since Nathaniel came to believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God straightaway, and afterwards his faith never wavered. Such must a true Christian be, dear brethren, and such must be – and is – the Orthodox Church, i.e. a Church in which there is no guile, no vain human invention, which is genuine in its teaching, its sacraments, its divine services, in all of its establishment. Truly such is our Orthodox Church, which has remained unchanged since the times of the apostles and which has been attested to by a multitude of saints and miracles.

The blood of many martyrs has been shed for the purity of our faith and our Church; there have been many heroic struggles with the enemies of truth – pagans, Moslems, false Christians. Great has been the suffering of venerable fathers and hierarchs, and other defenders of the faith. It is this which constitutes today's commemoration of the Triumph of Orthodoxy, – that from the holy Apostles to our days, and despite all the efforts of the servants of hell, the Orthodox faith has been preserved in all its truth and purity. The genuineness of our faith is further confirmed by the fact that so many different kinds of people lived by it and achieved salvation through it: noble kings, wise philosophers, great scientists, aristocrats and commoners, the rich and the poor, both men and women. The Orthodox faith brings people to a state of moral perfection and holiness, and only a perfect faith, with all its divine powers, can bring others to perfection.

Yes, dear brethren, only the Orthodox faith purifies and sanctifies the human nature which is defiled by sin; renews this imperfect nature by means of the sacraments of baptism, penitence, and communion; fills with love those who are quarreling; fills with hope those who are in despair; comforts those who are depressed; makes kind those who are crafty; reforms those who are corrupt; makes the greedy – abstemious; makes the cruel – charitable; adulterers makes chaste; egoists makes selfless; misers makes generous; madmen makes wise, and even the demonic makes godlike. Such are the miracles which the Orthodox faith works in men!

But why does it not produce such a spiritual transformation in us, dear brethren? Because we lack faith, because we are frivolous at heart, because we have distanced ourselves from the Church, we do not live the life of the Church, we do not live in accordance with its spirit, for us Orthodoxy is just a formality.

In order for us to be true Orthodox Christians, we must first of all have constant live contact with the Orthodox Church, we must take part in its prayers and sacraments, we must live in the spirit of our faith, follow its rules and commandments, and – most importantly – through genuine and profound repentance we must become as Christian as were all the saints, we must follow the example of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, so that the Lord would say about us, as He once said about Nathaniel: here is truly a Christian in whom there is no guile. Amen.

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