

Sermon For our beloved Father Barnabas

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live.”

(John 5:24-25)

Your Eminences, Reverend Fathers, brethren in Christ and dear Friends,
We have all congregated here today, to honour the passing of our beloved father, Priestmonk Barnabas, formerly known of course, as Priest Soterios before he was tonsured into the monastic ranks of course. Where does one begin to describe such a man? I do not think that our words alone can sum up who, he really was, still, I feel that we owe him at least a few words, to try and express who he really was.

Father Barnabas was a decoration to our humble church and a lantern for our parish. He truly was an inspiring man; who remained strong in his faith until the very end, even after having buried three children, a grandchild and his wife. Despite all these hardships, his faith in Christ remained strong, he rose above every test in life, he simply just kept on going and this could only have been accomplished because of his faith in Christ. He knew and believed that this life is just temporary and so he lived for the life to come, which shows that he was a very wise man. He remained positive and full of faith, not only for himself, but for his family and for his parish, but he also had a positive effect on everyone he met, this is why his absence from among us will truly be felt by us all. Even though we shall miss him dearly, he will never be forgotten, because what he left for us is a reminder of whom he was. He left a great inheritance for all of us, an inheritance, which is priceless, an inheritance which neither decays nor corrodes, but rather, it is an inheritance which transforms us from earthly beings into Heavenly beings, he left a place where we could worship our God and Creator, where we could give our offerings and thanksgiving to the All-mighty, and a place where we slowly become sanctified through the Mysteries of the Church. Obviously I am speaking about the church we are all physically standing in, which is a refuge for all of us, it is a spiritual hospital for us all who are spiritually ill, and I say this because we sin every day, but thankfully, we have this church where we can come and heal our souls. And know this, when people draw closer to God, through the Holy Sacraments, which are performed here in our church, then this blesses the soul of our beloved Father Barnabas even more, because he was the founder of the church here, he provided a place in which people can draw closer to God.

However, I must add, even this church, would be worthless, if the clergy and the people who attended were not following the true Orthodox Church. This is precisely why dear Fathers and brethren, our dear Father Barnabas didn't just leave us a church building, but he made sure that the parish he founded would keep to all the Orthodox practices and teachings, as well as the Holy Traditions (which is why we follow the Orthodox Calendar, instead of the Papal New Calendar) and Holy Canons, which our forefathers observed. Yes, father was indeed the founder of our parish, but more importantly, he was a genuine guardian of the Orthodox Faith which he preserved in this parish, an Orthodoxy which was pure and undefiled, just as he received by all the Orthodox Fathers of the Church before him. He was indeed a true shepherd who attended to and cared for his flock, and in his final years, made sure that before his departure from this life, his children will not be left without a father, so often he would tell me, for a long time he prayed and prayed and prayed, that God may send a priest to the parish before he went to his rest, well his answers were heard, because his intentions were pure. He would, every day without fail, unless he was not well of course, come to the church to light the oil lamps, and when he was stronger he would come twice a day. When he stopped driving few years ago, he came with the bus, and as he got weaker, his sons and daughters would bring him every day, until about a month ago. I cannot emphasize enough, how devoted he was to this parish and to the very church we are standing in. In the past five and a half years of knowing him, I was amazed at how much effort he put into the church, and that was at an old age, I couldn't even begin to image how much effort, labour and devotion he had for the church for the last forty years or so. How can one not be inspired by his dedication? Great is the blessing for those who look to beautify and care for the house of God because God in turn sanctifies us, just as we here in a prayer in the Divine Liturgy which says: ***"Sanctify O Lord, those who love the beauty of Thy House."***

Even though today, we mourn for the repose of our blessed Father Barnabas, at the same time we spiritually rejoice, because his physical death signifies his birth into eternal life, and this is what he longed for, which is what we all should long for. All his efforts and labours were made in the hope of becoming perfected in Christ, so that he may achieve everlasting life in the Kingdom of Heaven, just as we recite in the Holy Creed: ***"I look to the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the age to come."*** To him, life made perfect sense, because he knew what he was labouring for, he knew the purpose of his existence and invested in eternity, rather than materialism.

Having known Father Barnabas for the past five and a half years, it wasn't until his departure that I came to the realization of the fact that I will now be on my own as a priest here. He was there for me every day in my life, more than he and I both had known. He had a big influence on me, because I look back and remember our conversations, I remember

his works, and I can see that, a part of him has been rubbed off on me. I have learnt a lot from him.

He would always advise me when I needed advice from him, he would always be hospitable and compassionate towards me, well, not just to me, but to everyone, this is why, people in and around this community only have good words to say about him. Whenever he thought I was doing something wrong, he would always be sure to tell me, and this shows me that he did care for me, I guess he was trying to protect me from certain dangers. He was very straight talking and would tell you his thoughts directly, he wouldn't "beat around the bush" as they say, and frankly, this is how we all should be, because when we learn to talk to one another and accept each other's thoughts and advice then mankind will be so much better off. On the other hand, as much as he would share his thoughts with me, he would also ask me for my opinion on certain matters or let's say if something was playing on his mind, and this was a very humbling experience for me, because here he was, a 90 year old experienced priest, asking the young and inexperienced priest about his thoughts, I think that humility was part of his nature.

To me, his greatest quality, was that he genuinely wanted achieve his salvation; he wanted to be with His Creator when the time would come for his repose. And when I remember this, I remember the verse from the Psalm 41 which says: ***"As the hart panteth after the fountains of water, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God"***, which in modern English means: ***"Just as the deer seeks to find water fountains, this is how my soul seeks to find You, O God."*** Probably the best way to honour such a man is to imitate the love he had for God as well as that for his fellow man. This is without a doubt, the most important quality anyone could ever have, in fact even our Lord Jesus Christ Himself said to the young lawyer in the gospel, which he asked Him, which the greatest commandment of the Law was: ***"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."*** (Matthew 22:37-40)

I will now share a passage with you, which was said by a Saint that Father Barnabas looked up to so much. This saint is St. Mark of Ephesus, who you can all on your left hand side. As you can see Father wanted a big Icon of this saint, who was a Confessor of the Church, who in the 15th century broke off communion from the bishops and priests who were in communion with the Patriarch of Constantinople, because at that time the Patriarch wanted to unite the Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic, without the Roman Catholic Church repenting from Her false teachings and heresies. Unfortunately, today, he who is labelled the Patriarch of Constantinople, is doing worse things than that Patriarch, because, this Patriarch, is involved in the World Council of Churches, which is the organisation which

works to unite all Christian denominations under the banner of “love”. The passage I will now read, is from the writings of Saint Mark of Ephesus, who inspired our beloved Father Barnabas, and just like St. Barnabas, Father Barnabas and this was one of his favourite quotes.

“Concerning the Patriarch I shall say this, lest it should perhaps occur to him to show me a certain respect at the burial of this my humble body, or to send to my grave any of his hierarchs or clergy or in general any of those in communion with him in order to take part in prayer or to join the priests invited to it from amongst us, thinking that at some time, or perhaps secretly, I had allowed communion with him. And lest my silence give occasion to those who do not know my views well and fully to suspect some kind of conciliation, I hereby state and testify before the many worthy men here present that I do not desire, in any manner and absolutely, and do not accept communion with him or with those who are with him, not in this life nor after my death, just as (I accept) neither the Union nor Latin dogmas, which he and his adherents have accepted, and for the enforcement of which he has occupied this presiding place, with the aim of overturning the true dogmas of the Church.

I am absolutely convinced that the farther I stand from him and those like him, the nearer I am to God and all the saints, and to the degree that I separate myself from them am in union with the Truth and with the Holy Fathers, the Theologians of the Church; and I am likewise convinced that those who count themselves with them stand far away from the Truth and from the blessed Teachers of the Church.

And for this reason I say: just as in the course of my whole life I was separated from them, so at the time of my departure, yea and after my death, I turn away from intercourse and communion with them and vow and command that none (of them) shall approach either my burial or my grave, and likewise anyone else from our side, with the aim of attempting to join and concelebrate in our Divine services; for this would be to mix what cannot be mixed. But it befits them to be absolutely separated from us until such time as God shall grant correction and peace to His Church.”

After reading this passage, you begin to see how saints fought for true Orthodoxy, and had nothing to do with those who transgressed the Law. This is what Father Barnabas was believed and had done. This is essentially why he did not serve in the other churches here in Birmingham. He wasn't being difficult or stubborn, or old fashioned; neither did he want to make his own church. This man simply followed his conscience, and wanted to be in the Orthodox Church which was pure and undefiled and uncompromised. He realized that there can only be one truth, and one Church, because there is only One Lord, One Faith and One Baptism, just as St. Paul said to the Ephesians.

To finish, I will quote the words of St. Paul again, from 2 Timothy 3:8, because it is like I am hearing Father Barnabas talking.

“For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears;

And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.

But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.

For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand.

I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.”
Amen.