

In Hope They Believed Against Hope

This weekly bulletin insert complements the curriculum published by the Department of Christian Education of the Orthodox Church in America. This and many other Christian Education resources are available at <http://dce.oca.org>.



On June 22 we read Saint Paul's words in Romans 4:13-25. He urges us to follow the example of the patriarch Abraham, whose faith remained constant no matter what happened to him.

Abraham continued to believe God's promise that he would be the father of many nations, even as the years went by and he became an old man who still hadn't seen the promise fulfilled. Saint Paul puts it this way: "He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead because he was about a hundred years old, or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what He had promised" (19-21).

This is what Paul means by "in hope believing against hope." Abraham continued to believe God could and would keep His promise, even though immediate circumstances—his great age and his wife Sarah's barrenness—would seem to render it impossible for them to bear children and make him the father of many nations.

One of the saints commemorated on the previous day, June 21, is the martyr Julian of Tarsus. He was the son of a pagan father and a devout Christian mother. When she was widowed, she took her son from his birthplace, the town of Anazerba, to Tarsus. There she saw to his baptism and instructed him in the faith.

The grace of baptism and his mother's teaching kept Julian from denying his faith during the persecutions unleashed by the emperor Diocletian. Though he was just eighteen when he was arrested as a Christian, Julian not only withstood torture but resisted the promises of riches and honors if he would renounce Christ and worship the pagan gods. When they tortured him and threw him into a dungeon, his mother begged to be given three days with her son, assuring the jailers that she would convince him to offer sacrifice to the idols. Her request was granted.

When the three days had passed, Julian and his mother were brought before the magistrate, who began to praise her motherly influence for bringing her son to his senses. But his flowery words were interrupted by the voices of the mother and son, loudly proclaiming that Jesus Christ is the only true God.

Troparion - Tone 4

Your holy martyr Julian, O Lord,
through his suffering has received an incorruptible crown from You, our God.
For having Your strength, he laid low his adversaries,
and shattered the powerless boldness of demons.
Through his intercessions save our souls!

Julian's mother knew she was consigning him to execution when she urged him, imprisoned and severely weakened by torture, not to deny his faith. As a mother, she grieved her terrible loss. But like Abraham, she "did not waver when she considered his body" and her own body, which were "as good as dead." Like Abraham, "in hope she believed against hope," and the Church tells us that she and her son have received their crowns in the Kingdom of the One whose promises they believed.