

The Little Flock

By Metropolitan Saba (Isper)

Interestingly, in the Gospel, the Lord described His people as a little flock. “Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32). This may seem that Christ's flock is not large in number. Even His disciples were few during His short life on earth. But this same description holds true today: those who are faithful to the Lord are not great in number. Many may bear Christ’s name, glory be to Him, but this is not enough.

In this description, the Master presents a concept that began in the Old Testament with Abraham and continued to the New Testament. The Old Testament describes those who are faithful to the Lord as “the faithful remnant.” Not all of those who considered themselves believers and worshippers of God were sincere. Still, in every generation, an elite crop of righteous ones appeared and increased in righteousness until the coming of Christ. They submitted their will to the will of God. They were able to read the signs of the times with faith and know God’s purpose when others tried to replace it with their own intentions and interpretations.

In the New Testament, God’s journey with humanity took an upward, purifying, and edifying direction. Perhaps this journey was for the emergence of this faithful remnant, which would reach its height in the Mother of God. The righteousness of those who were steadfast in faithfulness continued, giving us the Virgin Mary, Joseph the Betrothed, John the Baptist, John the Evangelist, and many others like them.

Why do the faithful remain few, even though they are the leaven that leavens all the dough?

To the end, the faithful one clings to God and His Word, so God gives him the blessing of reading His unfathomable purposes, even if he does not understand these divine purposes at first.

When the forces of the Assyrian Empire were approaching Palestine (in the eighth century B.C.), and the people faced grave danger, the Prophet Isaiah took the initiative to sharpen resolve and strengthen morale. He called for true repentance, saying: “In repentance and obedience is your salvation, and in quietness and trust

is your strength” (Isaiah 30:15). The king also led a major religious reform movement, with the aim of purifying worship and returning from widespread apostasy. The prophet did not pay attention to the king’s movement, because he considered every official and imposed reform to be an external reform that does not affect the human heart. God wants internal reform that changes the human heart. The prophets led this teaching, completed by Christ, when the desired religion becomes a religion of inner purity, of which good deeds are an expression and reflection, and not an end in itself.

Isaiah believed that only a little remnant of believers would listen and be saved from destruction. “If the Almighty Lord had not left us a remnant of survivors, we would have become like Sodom and like Gomorrah” (Isaiah 1:9). “Only a remnant of them will return” (Isaiah 10:22). “Establish prayer for the remnant of the people” (Isaiah 37:4).

More than a hundred years later, in the time of the Prophet Jeremiah, the Babylonians attacked the Holy City (Jerusalem). The prophet called for religious reform, that is, repentance. The rich, under fear and malice, hastened to free their slaves. It quickly became clear that they were not motivated by piety and faithfulness to the Lord and His law. Rather, they sought to appease Him out of fear, and to relieve themselves of feeding the slaves while under attack and the threat of famine. As soon as Nebuchadnezzar ended his attack, and the people felt that the danger had passed, they hastened to re-enslave their slaves.

Like Isaiah, the Prophet Jeremiah was enthusiastic about reform that leads to repentance and salvation. Jeremiah emphasized that the reform that does not begin in the heart remains superficial and fragile and becomes subject to rapid decay. The prophet was convinced that true effective reform is not imposed by force, nor is it implemented by decrees and laws, but rather by radical reform that reaches the heart. He called for circumcision of the heart, not of the body: “Plough your land that is not plowed, and do not sow among thorns. Make a covenant with the Lord in your hearts, you men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem” (Jeremiah 4:3-4).

In every generation, people want to justify their conscience in various ways, without going into their depths and changing themselves. They keep vacillating between God and the mortal world, or eternal life and temporary life. Humans

want to gain earth and heaven, not based on the teachings of heaven, but rather those of this world. This is why they are enslaved to the demands of ego, the pride of luxurious living, and vainglory. They spend their lives wandering and searching for salvation and meaning.

What Jeremiah said in describing his people is true in every era and place: “Be amazed, O heavens, and tremble, and be astonished at this! My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and they have dug for themselves broken cisterns that cannot hold water” (Jeremiah 2:12-13).

Sincere believers would never trade God for anything else, no matter how much they suffer. They do not honor Him with their lips, but rather with their hearts. You see them washing and purifying themselves, removing the evil of their deeds from before His eyes, and refraining from wrongdoing. They learn kindness, seek justice, help the oppressed, defend the fatherless, and plead for the widow (Isaiah 1:16-17).

You can be an extremely committed believer and a dedicated servant in the church. But do not fall into temptation and think your heart will be the same as the heart of your God. Instead of imitating Him and rising to His level, you distort His image and make it resemble your fallen image, bringing Him down to your level.

If you consider yourself a believer, do not imagine that your faith guarantees His favor. On the contrary, your faith holds you to a greater responsibility, and your account will be based on what you know, as our Lord says in His gospel. Live your faith sincerely in order to be saved and be an example for the salvation of those around you.