

The Faith of Our Fathers

Nicodemus was already a member of the true Church. He had been taken into the covenant of grace by the sacrament of circumcision. He was an old experienced man. He was an elder of the Jews, a strict Pharisee, yet not so hypocritical and haughty as most of them. He did not despise Christ as they did, much less hate and persecute him. He considered him a rabbi and a teacher come from God, and gladly heard his teaching. He even went to him by night in order to converse with him about the way of salvation. He was a learned man, well-versed in the Scriptures. In other words, Nicodemus was a distinguished man about whom everyone thought: If he does not enter heaven, then who will?

And yet what does Christ say when he comes to him? He slammed the door to heaven shut in his face saying, except he become spiritual, born again, he with all his knowledge, virtues, and works, and with all his holiness, righteousness, worthiness, piety, and experience will be eternally lost.

From this it is clear, my dear hearers, that you can be a member of the true Church; you can have been born again through Holy Baptism; you can have had many experiences in the world and even have grey hair; you can gladly and diligently hear God's Word, know the pure doctrine, consider it the truth, and defend it; you can be ever so pious, that the whole world gazes at you in astonishment as a living saint, and yet be merely a natural man, who is still shut out of the kingdom of heaven, if you do not have a heart reborn by the Holy Spirit. Yes, even more; outwardly you can seem to be even a thousand times better than a truly regenerated Christian; but that will not help in the least, if you are not reborn because the Lord looks at the heart. (C. F. W. Walther) ❧❧❧

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The Lord knows who are His. Seeing them (that is, visiting them in mercy), He carries them on to the shore—to the peace of the life to come. The fisherman are the Teachers of the Church who catch us in the net of faith, and as it were bring us to the shore—to the land of the living. The net was broken but the fish do not escape. For the Lord preserves His own amid the trials of persecution. The Lord soothes the fears of people so that no one needs to be afraid in his conscience because of his own past guilt. He also soothes their fears so that when they see the innocence of others, they are neither confused nor discouraged to take the road to sanctity. (St. Bede)

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