

WEEKLY MEDITATION

THE HOLY PROPHET DANIEL

The Prophet Daniel and the Three Holy Children were descended from the royal tribe of Judah. While still children they were taken away as captives into Babylon. There they were brought up in the royal court. The young Daniel interpreted the mysterious dream of Nebuchadnezzar - that of a statue made up of various metals, shattered and ground to dust by a stone hewn from a mountain *'without the hand of man'*. We understand the mountain to represent the Mother of God and the stone to be Jesus Christ, Who by His coming shattered and destroyed the great totalitarian empires.

Daniel was called the *"man of desires"* because he longed for the freedom of his people. In his desire to know their future destiny, he earnestly prayed to God, fasting and making prostrations three times a day. Because of his prayers he was cast into a den of lions, for the king had decreed that there should be no worship anywhere in his kingdom other than worship of him. The mouths of the lions were mysteriously shut and Daniel moved among them *as though he were a shepherd among his sheep*.

As for the Three Children, since they refused to offer worship to the king's image, they were cast into a furnace of fire. They were preserved unharmed by an Angel of the Lord, that is, the Son of God Himself. Walking about in the furnace, *as though in the midst of dew*, they sang a wonderful hymn of praise to God. Coming out from the furnace unscathed, they prefigure the birth of the Savior, for the Theotokos, receiving the Fire of the Godhead within her womb, was not burned, but remained ever-virgin.

The Church celebrates the Three Children and Daniel three times in December: on the 17th, on the Sunday of the Forefathers, and on the Sunday before the Nativity.

Fr Andrew