



Evangelion

A Bulletin of Orthodox Christian Faith

15 June 2014

Called to Holiness

As we celebrate the Sunday of All Saints today, we hear Jesus Christ both challenging His disciples and assuring them of the reward that awaits those who have left all to follow Him, and who have remained faithful to Him despite hardship and persecution. He tells us that those who “love father or mother more than me are not worthy of me” and that those who have left “houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life.”

These are challenging words. We can certainly see them acted out dramatically in the lives of many of the saints, who literally left their families, and sometimes even their countries, for the sake of the Gospel. But we may wonder how they apply to us. Are we not also called to holiness?

It seems that the answer lies in what is in our hearts. Christ does not say that we should not love our families, nor are all called to leave their families and their lands. But He does say that if we love these things more than Him, then we are not worthy of Him.

What Jesus Christ is calling us to is the right ordering of that which we love. If He is at the centre of our lives, then we will be able to love all that He gives us, but in a way that gives glory to God. And, if we nurture our relationship with Him, then He will give us the wisdom to choose wisely so that our everyday lives may also become a path to holiness. For holiness is to be found not only in doing dramatic things for God, but in doing everyday ordinary things with a pure heart.



If the Lord has left us ignorant of the ordering of many things in this world, then it means it is not necessary for us to know: we cannot compass all creation with our minds. But the Creator Himself of heaven and earth and every created thing gives us to know Him in the Holy Spirit.

Saint Silouan the Athonite

In heaven all things live and move in the Holy Spirit. But this same Holy Spirit is on earth too.

The Holy Spirit dwells in our Church; in the sacraments; in the Holy Scriptures; in the souls of the faithful.

The Holy Spirit unites all men, and so the Saints are close to us; and when we pray to them they hear our prayers in the Holy Spirit, and our souls feel that they are praying for us.

The Saints live in another world, and there through the Holy Spirit they behold the glory of God and the beauty of the Lord's countenance.

But in the same Holy Spirit they see our lives, too, and our deeds. They know our sorrows and hear our ardent prayers.

Saint Silouan the Athonite

On Sunday 15 June 2014 we celebrate the Sunday of All Saints

Matins Gospel: Matthew 28:16-20

Epistle: Hebrews 11:33-40; 12:1-2

Gospel: Matthew 10:32-33; 37-38; 19:27-30

Resurrectional Apolytikion:

You came down from above, O Compassionate, you accepted burial for three days, that you might free us from the passions. Our life and resurrection, Lord, glory to you!

Apolytikion for All Saints:

Clothed in purple and fine linen with the blood of your martyrs throughout the world, your Church cries out to you through them, Christ God: Send down your pity on your people. Grant peace to your commonwealth, and to our souls great mercy.

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Readings and saints for this week:

Monday: Romans 2:28-29; 3:1-18; Matthew 6:31-34; 7:9-11
Beginning of Apostles' Fast - Tychon the Wonderworker; 40 Martyrs of Rome

Tuesday: Romans 4:4-12; Matthew 7:15-21
Martyr Isaurus & Companions; Martyrs Manuel, Sabel & Ismael

Wednesday: Romans 4:13-25; Matthew 7:21-23
Martyr Leontius & Companions;

Thursday: Jude 1:1-25; John 14:21-24
Apostle Jude; Martyr Zosima; Paisius the Great of Egypt

Friday: Romans 5:17-21; 6:1-2; Matthew 9:14-17
Hieromartyr Methodios; Father Callistus; Nicholas Cabasilas

Saturday: Romans 3:19-24; Matthew 7:1-8
Martyr Julian; Hieromartyr Terentios of Iconius

A Mercy of Peace, a Sacrifice of Praise

An introduction to the Divine Liturgy (continued)

We saw last week how the consecrated Bread that is Christ's Body is broken in preparation for the distribution of Holy Communion. But it is "broken yet not divided," "eaten yet never consumed." After this, the clergy receive Holy Communion and then the priest emerges from the altar, raises the Chalice, and invites us to receive the Holy Gifts with the words:

With fear of God, with faith and love, draw near.

While the clergy have been receiving Holy Communion, the choir sings a special Communion verse that varies according to the season. But this should also be a time for us to prayerfully prepare

ourselves to receive the Holy Gifts. We should have prepared ourselves in advance before coming to church, but this is the time to complete that preparation.



We cannot make ourselves "worthy" to receive the Holy Gifts, but we can prepare ourselves as best we can. And the better prepared we are, the greater the benefit we will receive from Holy Communion. This spiritual preparation involves the nurturing of faith, the fear of God, and love. This requires an ongoing effort on our part, a seriousness about our faith, and the utilizing of the tools that the Church gives us, namely, prayer, fasting, confession and constant repentance.

Faith is the starting point of our life in Christ. It is a gift from God, but it is also something that we can nurture within ourselves by making time for God, by quietening our minds, and by not allowing the competing noises of the world to overwhelm us. As we grow in faith, we become more aware of God's presence in our lives, and, especially, of His presence in the Divine Liturgy. Saint John Chrysostom writes:

His very Body is before us ... not only for us to touch, but for us to eat and be filled. Let us then draw near with faith, since all of us have some illness. For if such power has been transmitted to those who but touched the hem of His garment [cf. Matt. 14:36; Luke 8:46-47], how much more power will they who have Him in His entirety within them receive? To draw near to Christ with faith, however, does not only mean receiving Holy Communion, but also to touch it with a pure heart, as if we were approaching Christ Himself.



If you take into account that the Holy Things [the holy Body and Blood of the Lord] set forth here are so precious that even the Seraphim are far from being worthy to touch them, and then reflect on your Lord's love for mankind, you will be amazed that the grace of the holy Body and Blood does not spurn descending even to our worthlessness. Bearing this in mind, O human, and considering the magnitude of the gift, raise yourself up once and for all, abandon the earth and ascend to heaven.

Saint John Chrysostom

☞ Sunday of All Saints ☛

Today, on the first Sunday after Pentecost, we celebrate the Sunday of All Saints. The services for today are the final services in the "Pentecostarion," the book which contains the liturgical texts from Pascha until today. The Sunday of All Saints is therefore in many ways the culmination of our Easter faith, and it flows naturally from the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, which we celebrated last week.

In today's feast we recognize all those who have struggled to live lives of holiness, including those whom we would otherwise forget. We are all called to holiness, for we are called to share in God's own life. We are called to take our struggle for salvation seriously and the saints are those who provide us with an example in this, and who help us by their prayers.

However, true holiness is not simply making a great effort to conform to some ideal. Rather, it is about allowing the Risen Christ to live in us, and to allow the Holy Spirit to transform us and to restore in us God's Image which has become distorted by our sin.

The holiness of the saints is therefore the consequence and the proof of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is also the visible testimony to the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, for the Holy Spirit enlightens us and makes it possible for us to attain the destiny that God has prepared for us.



And what are the "Lives of the Saints"? They are nothing else but a certain kind of continuation of the "Acts of the Apostles."

In them is found the same Gospel, the same life, the same truth, the same righteousness, the same love, the same faith, the same eternity, the same "power from on high," the same God and Lord.

For "the Lord Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever" (Heb. 13:8): the same for all people of all times, distributing the same gifts and the same Divine energies to all who believe in Him.

This continuation of all life-creating Divine energies in the Church of Christ from ages to ages and from generation to generation indeed constitutes living Holy Tradition.

Saint Justin Popovich