



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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June 11, 2017

All Saints Sunday

Holy Apostles Bartholomew and Barnabus
222 Chinese New Martyrs of the Boxer Uprising (1900)

St. Paisios responds to the question: "Geronda, practically speaking, what will help me in acquiring humility?" "How does one acquire humility? Blessed one, when you are given an opportunity for humility, accept it. This is how humility is acquired."

- The St. Peter and Paul Fast begins tomorrow through June 28.
- ✘ Tuesday, June 13, 6:30pm - Inquirer's Class
- ✘ Holy Baptism – Next Sunday, June 18, 1:30pm – Baby Helena Jones



Saint Justin Popovich on the Saints of God

The holiness of God is the goal of human life on earth.

Lord Jesus Christ,
mercy on me,

The Jesus Prayer

To piously venerate the Saints consists in observing a relationship of prayer with these persons in the image of Christ, in glorifying their divinely-directed virtues, in humbly imitating their holy lives and in calling upon the help of their blessing. When the Church glorifies these athletes of the faith, she glorifies them as persons who glorify God, as God-bearers, in whom God reveals His wonders: God is wonderful in His Saints (Psalm 67:36). When she magnifies the miracles that they accomplished on earth by grace, the Church magnifies them as tireless workers who fulfilled the Gospel of Christ, as Christ-bearers, as those in whom Christ lives and has His being. In truth, when we show forth our veneration towards the Saints, it is to the God Who is in them that we address our veneration, to the God Who dwells in His Saints; and likewise it is to the Christ Who dwells in them that we address our veneration, to the Christ Who lives in their holy souls. When we venerate the Saints with piety and in prayer, in no way is it to divinize them, for we do not revere them as gods, but we venerate them because they are pleasing to God, because they are pleasing to Christ and are familiars of God, friends of God; they are joint-heirs of Christ as our intercessors and our defenders before God. We offer them this veneration in diverse ways: by honoring their relics, by erecting temples in their names, by contemplating their virtues and by invoking their prayers.

The holiness of God is the goal of human life on earth. Behold the reason for which God became man: it was to show us as the God-man how it is possible to become divinely holy. By which means? Only with the help of the holy mysteries and the holy virtues can we do this. This is also why God created man in the image of God: so that it might be natural for him to live in the God-man, the Lord Jesus Christ, in the divine-human body of the Church, in order to thus become divinely holy. These glad tidings are sounded throughout the Holy Gospel. Calling Christians to be holy as our God and Lord Christ is holy, the Apostle Peter teaches the following: "But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation. Be ye perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect. For it is written, be ye holy; for I am holy." (I Peter 1:15-16, Leviticus 11:45). The Savior Himself commanded His disciples: "Be ye perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). Fully within the heart of the divinely-human teachings of the Savior, the Holy Apostle Paul proclaims to the Christians: "The very God of peace sanctify you wholly" (I Thessalonians 5:23). Indeed, what does God expect of us? He awaits holiness from us, "for this is the will of God, even your sanctification" (I Thessalonians 4:3).

In reality, the Saint is the only true human being. This is why the Lord Jesus Christ became a man: it was to the end that the God-man might make man appear as a god-man by grace. The divinely-human Body of Christ, the Church, is also this divine workshop which allows the transformation of men into Saints, into god-men by grace, by means of the holy mysteries and the holy virtues. In the Church, each can be sanctified in proportion to his life in the holy mysteries and in the holy virtues. The Saints are those who place more resolve in this task and this is why they become, by their exploits, Christ-bearing and God-bearing wonderworkers. As for us, who venerate them with piety, when we contemplate them, we glorify the only true God and Lord of the human race, Jesus Christ, the One Who is the only source of divine holiness for this infinitely mysterious being called man.

How precious and important the holiness of the Saints can be in the eyes of God Himself is proved by the fact that it is God Himself who magnifies and glorifies the righteous who have acquired holiness by a life pleasing to God. Divine revelation calls them 'friends of God,' because they became close to, and familiars of, God. God so loves the righteous, he values them so, that for their sake he spares entire cities sunk in impiety in answer to their prayers. Now if the all-perfect and all-powerful Lord ascribes such importance to the righteous, it is very natural that the Church should offer her veneration in piety and in prayer. For when we venerate the Saints, in reality we venerate the One Who in them is the unique Holiness, the One Who alone possesses sufficient love and power to make the Saints holy. When they followed the commandments of God, the pious men of the Old Testament piously venerated their life, not only on the earth but also after death. This teaching of the Old Testament is verily an eternal teaching: "The righteous shall be in everlasting memory" (Psalm 111:6). Those who have not rendered unto the righteous the veneration that is due them fall under condemnation and punishment -- even after their death. The memory of the Saints must be immortal because their virtue is immortal and not only men, but God Himself recognizes it eternally.



On Humility – St. Barsanouphios, Elder of Optina (+1911)

"Fr. Macarius, Fr. Ambrose, Fr. Moses, and all of our Elders (of Optina) always said, "Be humble, be humble." It's like when St. John the Theologian, towards the end of his life, would only say, "Little children, love one another." That's how our Elders would repeat, "Be humble." These two virtues, love and humility, are dependent upon one another, like warmth and light. As it's impossible to imagine light without warmth, so it is here. I remember, Archimandrite Isaac would be walking along and he'd say, "Well then, Brother Paul, how are things?" "Glory be to God, by your holy prayers." "Yes, you've got to be humble. Humility is the height." I'd receive his blessing and he would move on. And so now I'm saying to you—be humble. Peace be unto you!"

Masters of Their Own Money

"A different pattern of behavior is exhibited by a small number of people who are pleasing to God. They have become the masters of their own wealth. And they have used it, as if it were their faithful slave, to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to free the debtors who are insolvent and in prison. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Job, Joseph, David acted like this. Money was not the master of these people; they were the masters of their money."

Saint Philoxenus of Mabbug

St. Paisios responds to the question: 'Geronda, how is humility cultivated?'

"Humility is cultivated through *philotimo* (the love shown by humble people) and it is also cultivated through the manure of our failings. It all depends. A person with *philotimo* attributes all of his good traits to God. He acknowledges the many benefactions of God; realizes that he has not responded appropriately; is humbled and constantly praises God. The more he is humbled and praises God, the more he is showered with divine Grace. This is voluntary humility. Involuntary humility, on the other hand, is the type brought about by long-term falls into sin."

THE TESTIMONY OF THE SAINTS

Those who have advanced a lot in [the spiritual] struggle have great access towards God because they made sacrifices for His love and offered whatever they had to obtain Him. They became His close friends, His brethren, heirs of His Grace, even from now here on earth.

They are God's Saints.

They don't simply believe in God. They live in God and God lives in them. That is why they keep on hoping even in the most difficult moments when the rest of us are at a loss.

They remain steadfast, even when everything around them is disturbed.

They are filled with mystic joy, even when everything tends to be surmounted by sorrow.

They are in peace, even when confusion overcomes everyone and everything.

Frost warms them, as it did the Forty Martyrs in the frozen lake of Sebastia.

The heatwave refreshes them, as it did the three Children in the furnace of Babylon.

The elements of nature and the animals respect and obey them, as did the wild beasts the holy Martyrs in the arenas at the time of the persecutions of the Christians by the Romans.

All these supernatural things which happen in their life, seem so weird that they resemble fairy tales. Many people, in fact, mock and easily disbelieve their Lives as recorded in the Synaxarion (Lives of the Saints). It is very difficult for them, indeed, to understand those who have overcome their nature and have reached the supernatural. It is very difficult indeed for those who ignore their spiritual nakedness.

However, the Saints become with their life the salt of the earth, the light of the world. They didn't pursue it themselves, for they are deeply humble. It came of its own.

They came "out of great tribulation" and the slaughtered Lamb, Christ, made the robe of their soul white and now the glowing arrows of the devil don't harm them.

The Saints are red hot from the warmth of the Spirit and are armored with the shield of faith. They become armored with Christ's

"apatheia" (dispassion), His life-giving humility and love. Thus they become sons of God, comforters after the only Paraclete.

There are today even in our times such heavenly people on earth, "having flesh and living in the world", but "being not of the world." They lived and still live among us, but are not known by many. However, those who have discovered them, they are the ones who now understand the words of the Church: "Taste and see that the Lord is good."

Man, far from God, has singers, actors, sports stars, and politicians as models for imitation.

He imitates people that in general are far from God's morality; empty, egoist and proud men, filled with glory that corrupts and is corrupted.

He imitates people without content, without peace and without any spiritual beauty.

He imitates individuals imbued with sin.

Individuals with confused logic and shallow ideas, with strange or even silly behavior and with sometimes animal-like and inhuman instincts.

He imitates disturbed and repulsive faces that testify the obscurity of their souls....

We have other models.

After Christ, we have the Theotokos, our Saints and the contemporary Saints of our Church.

They have truth shining on their graceful faces.

These are holy faces, clean and luminous, with a peaceful and meek look; a look full of sympathy for the tribulations of this world. They are ready to offer themselves for every sacrifice of love.

Humble and modest.

Brotherly, for they are godly.

With their smile they inspire.

Their every movement is modest and discreet.

Their speech is always decent, wise, supporting, didactic.

They have a deep knowledge of man's soul.

They are scientists enriched with the real wisdom of God.

They are prophetic images that question consciences with their love, without anyone being able to question them.

Huge statures of the Spirit.

Protectors of all the world.

Secret protectors with their powerful prayer towards God.

Our light-houses, guides, our Fathers.

We cling to them and we hope. After God they nourish us. They open our eyes and we realize, "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today and forever" (Heb. 13:8).

They convince us that we, too, the humble ones can, if not only to succeed like them, at least can live according to their example. They convince us that even today men can unite with God and sanctify themselves, as always, in the Orthodox Church of Christ....

All of us have been summoned to become like them. To struggle like them in our life, in order to truly feel happy as they do.

These are not words without content. They are not illusive ideas and dreams. They are tangible reality. The Saints, the Saints of our days, interpret, explain, and prove to us that they are palpable truth.

That is why it is of great value, it is an inexpressible blessing for us to be worthy of meeting Saints in our life!

The Merciful Lord has made us, His humble children, worthy and we have met his Saints in our life. From this humble experience of ours we want our brethren too, to be informed in their hearts.

We want to confess and thunder out to our brethren, who for whichever reason find it difficult to accept Christ in their life, that our Faith, the Faith of the Orthodox, the only true Faith of Christ is alive more than ever in our times. The Faith that:

- Was preached by the Apostles
- was honored by the Martyrs
- Was taught by the Holy Fathers and Teachers of the Church
- Was illuminated in the lives of the holy Ascetics
- Achieved great feats in the life of the Orthodox heroes of our noble race and
- Illuminates and supports even in our days with the luminous example of the contemporary Saints...

We are invited to imitate and follow these glorious Fathers and ancestors of ours.

- Fr. Philotheos of Grigoriou, Mount Athos

Two from St. John of Kronstadt: On Faith and Humble Submission

✘ "Faith is the key of God's treasury. She dwells in simple, kind, loving hearts. 'All things are possible to him that believeth.' Faith is a spiritual mouth, the more freely it opens the greater the stream by which the Divine springs enter into it; let this mouth freely open, as your bodily one does; do not let your lips be compressed by doubt and unbelief: if you compress them by doubt and unbelief, the treasury of God's blessings will be closed to you. The more openly, the more heartily you believe in God's omnipotence, the more bountifully will God's heart be opened to you. 'What things so ever ye desire, when ye pray believe that ye receive them and ye shall have them.'"

✘ "Bear with humble submission to the will of God every sorrow, every sickness and infirmity, every labor, every offense and disappointment, saying: Thy will be done' (Lk. 11:2), knowing that God's mercy orders everything for your good, and that the Lord can easily change every disappointment into happiness and joy."

THE WAY OF THE SAINT *by Father Thomas Hopko*

—Every Saint pays attention to details and does the smallest, seemingly most insignificant act with the greatest love and devotion. For the Saint, no act is too small, no work too trifling, no task too demeaning, no deed too insignificant. Every little thing, for the Saint, has eternal value and importance. Every little thing is done before God and has meaning and fulfillment in Him.

—Every Saint pays attention to persons . . . and not to structures, institutions, parties, programs or roles. For the Saint only the person counts, and everything else is subordinated and ordered to the good of the person. The Saint is never impersonal. He never loves or serves "humanity in general." He only loves and serves the person near at hand, the neighbor given by God—the most difficult and most divine manner of acting that there is.

—Every Saint loves the whole of God's good creation, not only living persons, but animals, plants and all that positively exists. The Saint never blasphemes God's good world, but rejoices in the beauties of creation to the glory of their Creator.

—Every Saint is an utter realist. There is no sentimentality in the Saint, no partial views, no prejudicial opinions, no petty interests. There may be real passions and fanatically impassioned actions. There may be factual one-sidedness and fierce conviction, but it is always in the light of the total reality of God and man, and it is always for the good of all. The Saint is not self-indulgent in his sanctity. He is not a "spiritual glutton."

—Every Saint suffers—with joy and gladness—for others. The Saint does not "come down from his cross." He loves his cross as the way to his resurrection. He loves his death to himself as the way to his life in God. He loves to put himself down, and be put down, if it means that someone else will be saved and exalted. The Saint is not a masochist. He does not love sufferings and pains for their own sake. But he is a realist who knows that what is lasting and good requires the payment of a great price, and he is willing to pay the price in his own blood. When one does good in the sinful world, he suffers. It is as simple as that. And the Saint does good.

—Every Saint hates sin, in himself and others, but he loves the sinner, including his own "self," as created in the image and likeness of God, and as loved and saved by God in Christ. The Saint knows himself to be the "greatest of sinners."

What is Culture? from Ut Plures Sint (excerpt) **Anthony Esolen** - MARCH 2, 2017

You cannot have a holy place unless you really believe that it is holy, hallowed by God or by one of His appointed ministers.

Culture, says a Jewish rabbi writing for the Orthodox in 1929, is the manifestation of “the divine, in man and through man.” He proceeds to show us how the Jewish lad must allow the Torah to take root in his mind, to form his imagination, and to direct his passions, his thoughts, and his deeds. Now that is something I can understand: It is a definition. The rabbi would no more recommend “diversity” in the boy’s prayer and worship than he would recommend that a married man experiment with other women on the side.

...You cannot have a holy place unless you really believe that it is holy, hallowed by God or by one of His appointed ministers. But that is precisely what the cultural diversity promoters cannot do. Because he is committed neither to any one culture, nor to the survival of other cultures singularly themselves across the world, he is at best a tourist of the holy, in Rome with the Catholics and on the banks of the Ganges with the Hindus, but not really a part of any of them. At worst he demands that others adopt his indifference, or his hatred of the boundary-drawing force of religion and culture, and that must destroy the very sense of the holy itself.

If culture has not to do with the divine, or with the holy as set apart from utilitarian purposes, we might fall back upon the wisdom of the bittersweet moralist Matthew Arnold, for whom culture is “a pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know, on all the matters which most concern us, the best which has been thought and said in the world.”

....So “diversity” means not that there should be a diversity of thriving cultures across the world, but that this civilization and what is left of American culture should pass away. Since people who want this show little sense of what a culture is, they are cavalier about what is to replace what they hate. That does not matter, nor does it matter whether their prescriptions here destroy cultures elsewhere to boot.

... After worship, the most determinative feature of any culture is how it comes to terms with sex: the facts of male and female, and their relations to each other and to their children. But the secular West now decrees: For the sake of “gender diversity” there shall be no boundaries, no definitions. That is an all-eating acid. No culture can contain it.

...Summing it up, then: To its most vocal proponents, “cultural diversity” implies a virtuous hatred of Western civilization, and the global spread of a secular Western ethic as regards sex, marriage, family, and the rearing and education of children. The result will be not diversity but dreary sameness; not jewels gleaming each in its particular character, but mud.

Now we may return to the teachings of Christ and the Church. Christian liberals say that “diversity,” so defined, is compatible with the faith. But it is not compatible with any decent pagan culture, let alone with Christianity. No pagan hates his own home, and the home for Christianity was the world wherein it pleased the Father to send the Son: the particular world of the Jewish faith amid the political and intellectual matrix of Greco-Roman antiquity. You may begin by hating Plato and Aristotle, Aeschylus and Sophocles, Virgil and Ovid, Origen and Augustine; you will end by hating Christ. Nor can any pagan accept the secular West’s sexual disintegration-by-design. To say that it does not matter how the next generation is brought into the world is to say that the future need have no connection with the past, and that is to say that there shall be no culture at all.

Demons can only parody the divine, and we have such a parody here. Jesus commanded the Apostles to go forth and “make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” He did not command them to obliterate the nations. The Church has embraced, cleansed, and elevated cultures: They, though many, can become one in Christ. The secular West has lost any sense of the goodness of human nature and of gratitude to its Creator...

St. Vincent of Lérins, Commonitorium 2.4-8 (c. 434 AD)

"True knowledge is found only among those genuinely worshiping God."

1) I have continually given the greatest pains and diligence to inquiring, from the greatest possible number of men outstanding in holiness and in doctrine, how I can secure a kind of fixed and, as it were, general and guiding principle for distinguishing the true catholic faith from the degraded falsehoods of heresy. And the answer that I receive is always to this effect; that if I wish, or indeed if anyone wishes, to detect the deceits of heretics that arise and to avoid their snares and to keep healthy and sound in a healthy faith, we ought, with the Lord's help, to fortify our faith in a twofold manner, firstly, that is, by the authority of God's Law, then by the tradition of the catholic Church.

(2) Here, it may be, someone will ask, Since the canon of Scripture is complete, and is in itself abundantly sufficient, what need is there to join to it the interpretation of the Church? The answer is that because of the very depth of Scripture all men do not place one identical interpretation upon it. The statements of the same writer are explained by different men in different ways, so much so that it seems almost possible to extract from it as many opinions as there are men. Novatian expounds in one way, Sabellius in another, Donatus in another, Arius, Eunomius and Macedonius in another, Photinus, Apollinaris and Priscillian in another, Jovinian, Pelagius and Caelestius in another, and latterly Nestorius in another. Therefore, because of the intricacies of error, which is so multiform, there is great need for the laying down of a rule for the exposition of Prophets and Apostles in accordance with the standard of the interpretation of the catholic Church.

(3) Now in the catholic Church itself we take the greatest care to hold that which has been believed everywhere, always and by all (quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum est). That is truly and properly 'catholic,' as is shown by the very force and meaning of the word, which comprehends everything almost universally. We shall hold to this rule if we follow universality, antiquity, and consent. We shall follow universality if we acknowledge that one Faith to be true which the whole Church throughout the world confesses; antiquity if we in no wise depart from those interpretations which it is clear that our ancestors and fathers proclaimed; consent, if in antiquity itself we keep following the definitions and opinions of all, or certainly nearly all, bishops and doctors alike.

(4) What then will the catholic Christian do, if a small part of the Church has cut itself off from the communion of the universal Faith? The answer is sure. He will prefer the healthiness of the whole body to the morbid and corrupt limb. But what if some novel contagion try to infect the whole Church, and not merely a tiny part of it? Then he will take care to cleave to antiquity, which cannot now be led astray by any deceit of novelty. What if in antiquity itself two or three men, or it may be a city, or even a whole province be detected in error? Then he will take the greatest care to prefer the decrees of the ancient General Councils, if there are such, to the irresponsible ignorance of a fewmen. But what if some error arises regarding which nothing of this sort is to be found? Then he must do his best to compare the opinions of the Fathers and inquire their meaning, provided always that, though they belonged to diverse times and places, they yet continued in the faith and communion of the one catholic Church; and let them be teachers approved and outstanding. And whatever he shall find to have been held, approved and taught, not by one or two only but by all equally and with one consent, openly, frequently, and persistently, let him take this as to be held by him without the slightest hesitation.