

## **All Saints of America**

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Glory to Jesus Christ!

In the weeks that follow Pentecost the Church calls us to remember those men, women, and children who through the descent of the Holy Spirit have lived lives of sanctity and holiness, actualizing in their own personal lives everything which Christ Himself had accomplished for us.

Last week we celebrated the feast of All the Saints from every place and time, and this week we celebrate those Saints who have shown forth in our own land, the Saints of North America. These saints confirm for us that salvation is indeed possible in every time and place, even right here and right now in modern day America, should we desire it and be willing to work with God to achieve it.

When we look at the lives of the North America Saints we see great variety and diversity. We see people who came from various ethnic backgrounds, people who came from all different corners of the globe, people who were born into the Orthodox Faith as well as those who accepted it later in life, we see clergy and laity, monks and married people, young and old, we see evangelists, equals to the Apostles, confessors, martyrs, ascetics, and as we say in the Liturgy every righteous spirit made perfect in faith.

Yet in all of the saints of our land, known and unknown, we also see great unity for they all bore within themselves that same grace of the one Holy Spirit. No matter what their lives had in store for them externally, they all lived that same inner life of the Spirit, they each acknowledged their shortcomings, turned to the Lord in repentance, and they each received from Him that great grace of salvation – a grace which they did not hoard for themselves but freely offered to all who were willing to receive it.

And in so doing, the Saints of North America built up the Orthodox Church in our land. They erected temples, built monasteries, established seminaries and orphanages – they created languages to evangelize the natives, they ministered to the poor in villages and cities, they worked miracles, healing spiritual and physical diseases, stopping forest fires and tidal waves, they translated the Scriptures, the liturgical services, and the writings of the Fathers, and following the example of the Apostle Paul, they became all things to all men.

And through these things they inspired the faithful to not only persevere in the Christian Faith but also to work themselves for the building up of the Body of Christ in America.

It is this inspiration which we celebrate today. An inspiration which comes not from eloquent words, which lack the backing of deeds, but an inspiration which comes from the words and actions of people whose lives were truly transformed by the Holy Spirit,

transformed to the point that they manifested what it is to be a true Christian, transformed to the point where when people saw them, they saw Jesus Christ.

You see, the Saints knew that in order to build up the Body of Christ, they themselves first needed to become Temples of the Holy Spirit, they needed to become Christ-like. In order to become that vessel through which God can work in the lives of others, they first needed to allow God to work in their own lives. And so, when they began Christianizing our land, they began with themselves, before they converted anyone to Christ, they were first converted – and converted on the very deepest level, an inner conversion.

And through their own inner conversion, they came to experience that eternal life, that more abundant life which Christ came to offer us. And this experience gave their words and deeds power, the power to inspire others to follow Christ and live the Orthodox Faith.

Through their inner conversion, the Saints experienced that peace, joy, and love which all of mankind craves at the very deepest level. They experienced that unity with God which Christ had come to reestablish.

And people saw this within them, they saw that somehow these Christians were different, there was something extraordinary about them, they were not like the others who professed the Gospel in word but denied it in deed.

People saw that these Christians, these Saints, had acquired something for themselves which no one else had, for they had acquired a fulfillment truer and happiness greater than anything found in this world – they had acquired true life in God.

And because they had acquired this true life for themselves they were able to help others achieve it as well. One of the wisest sayings of the Fathers is, “How can you give to someone what you haven’t yet acquired for yourself?”.

And how true is this, even in the worldly sense. Think about it. How can I educate someone if I first haven’t studied and been educated myself? Or how can I give someone financial advice if I myself am on the verge of bankruptcy? Who will listen to me?

The answer is no one, no one will listen to me. And this is because people want to have assurance of what is being offered to them – they want to see it before they buy it, especially if what they are going to buy is expensive. And, as we know, the kingdom of God is the most expensive thing there is, it is the pearl of great price, it is the one thing needful for which we are called to lay aside all earthly cares.

The Lord is very clear on this: the cost of heaven is the earth, the cost of resurrection to eternal life is death to sin and corruptible life.

Brothers and sisters, we know that making this purchase, having this genuine inner conversion, is not easy, nor is it something which we do once and for all and are done

with. Rather, as the Lord says, the kingdom of God is entered with violence and force, and that we who are to enter therein must take up our crosses and follow Him each and every day.

This the Saints did. They struggled and worked like each of us, they fell into sin and they got up, they made mistakes and they corrected them, there were things in their lives which they knew they needed to change even though they didn't want to but they changed them anyway. All for the sake of Christ and His kingdom. And all because they knew that this kingdom was not only real but also because they knew that this kingdom was open to them. You see, the Saints of America had the witness of the Saints before them, and the Saints before them the witness of the Saints before them, and so on back to the Apostles, who themselves had the witness of Christ Himself.

Remember what the Lord said before He ascended into heaven, and before He sent down upon His disciples the Holy Spirit. He told them that He was going to prepare a place for them, so that where He is they too might be. He said, "In My Father's house there are many mansions... And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, so that where I am, you may be also." And then He said to them, "And where I am going you know, and the way you know... [For] I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no one comes to the Father but by Me."

In these words of the Lord, one of the most powerful mysteries of the Christian Faith is revealed: that there is no other way to the eternal life and mansions in God's kingdom but through Jesus Christ – not wealth nor power, not fame nor good looks, not intelligence nor anything of this earth, nothing will lead to the Father except Jesus Christ.

This is the truth that Christ revealed to His disciples in the night before He gave Himself up for the life of the world. This is the truth which was confirmed in the Apostles when they received the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. And this is the truth which was manifested in the lives of the Saints: that in Jesus Christ alone can we find true fulfillment and happiness because He alone can lead us to His Father's heavenly kingdom.

Brothers and sisters, if we are to manifest this truth to the people of Delmarva, if we are to build up the Body of Christ, we must first accept this truth ourselves, we must first allow our lives to be transfigured by the Holy Spirit to the point that we become Christ-like. And this entails being willing to trade earth for heaven, death for eternal life, lest as the Apostle Peter says while we proclaim liberty to others we ourselves might be found slaves to corruption.

This way of Christ is straight, narrow, and difficult, yet it is a way that has been traversed by men, women, and children of all times and places – including modern day America. This way of Christ is the only way to the Father's Heavenly mansions. Let us be inspired by the Saints of our land to make this way our way, so that we too might join them in the Heaven and with them become an inspiration for others to travel the path of Christ to His Father's Heavenly Kingdom.

Fr. John Parsells

6/10/07

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