

Sunday of All the Saints of Mount Athos

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



Last Sunday we celebrated the local saints of the North American continent. Now, today is the Sunday on which we remember all of the monastic saints of the Holy Mountain, Athos. And by extension, we remember all monastics saints of the Orthodox Church in general, wherever they may have lived and no matter at what time. Like the other categories or ranks of saints, this has been a great “cloud of witnesses.”

In Orthodox Christianity we see St. John the Baptist, the Forerunner, as the great founder and patriarch of Orthodox monastic life. From his time in the first century there were always men and women who went out into the desert to live the monastic life as hermits. And then, in the third century, a man we know as St. Anthony the Great arrived on the scene. He inspired many, many women to seek the monastic life and from his time to this there has been an unbroken and golden chain of monks and nuns seeking to bear witness to the special charisma or calling of the monastic life.

And what is that charisma or calling? The monastic is the one who takes all of the so-called “hard sayings” or precepts of the Lord literally. He sells all that he has and gives to the poor and follows Christ, and Christ alone. He turns his back on the world—not because the world is evil, but because he wishes to choose a higher good, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. By giving up the legitimate companionship of marriage and family, of success in the world, the monk or nun seeks the Lord Himself as his father, mother, wife, husband, for Christ is all things in all things to the monastic.

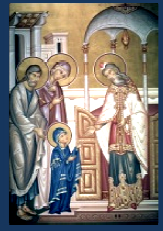
One of the qualities that some monastics develop is the gift of discernment, which is the ability to see and understand things very clearly and truthfully, without the trimmings that worldly culture and society tries to give things. This makes some monastics ideal confessors, and spiritual fathers and mothers, and so in the old Orthodox countries it is very common for laity to go to monasteries for confession and counsel. Because the monk or nun does not have a spouse or children, he or she is able to love everyone unconditionally and be a spiritual mother or father to all, without exception.

As the ancient saying goes: “[Angels are a light to monks; monks are a light to lay men and women.](#)”

July 3, 2011

Sunday Sermon

Fr Ambrose Young
Entrance of the Theotokos Skete



This is the chain of enlightenment that flows from the very throne of God to this earth. In the Orthodox world, Mount Athos is the center of monasticism. Its ancient traditions and spiritual practices, wisdom and way of life are a model, to one degree or another, for all monks and nuns, wherever they may live in the world. Historically, monasteries have always been the beating heart of the Church. This is still true everywhere but here in America, where monasticism is still very small and feeble. In the past, it has often been monks who have defended the Church against innovations, modernism, and heresy.

It is the monk or nun's Prayer Rope that is a constant reminder of the special prayer that traditional Orthodox monastics pursue—called Hesychasm, Unceasing Prayer, or the prayer of silence; sometimes also called the Prayer of the Heart or The Jesus Prayer. It is this unique Orthodox form of prayer, together with its methods and quite vast literature, which helps to bring the monastic closer and closer and closer to Christ in this life. Yet, there are not two different spiritualities in the Church, one for monastics and one for laity. They are the same, only monastics are supposed to be leading the way.



The innermost essence of Orthodox monasticism is called "joyful mourning." This seems to be a contradiction, but it describes a special spiritual state in which the monk or nun grieves for his own sins and the sins of the world and yet at exactly the same time he experiences the tremendous joy of Christ's resurrection and His forgiveness of our sins.

["A monk dies in order to live, he forgets himself in order to find his real self in God, he becomes ignorant of worldly knowledge in order to attain real spiritual wisdom which is given only to the humble ones."](#) (From the St. Anthony's website)

To read the lives of monastic saints is to experience a special exaltation of heart and mind, for the best monastics exhibit a way of life that actually all Orthodox Christians are called to—not so much in externals, but in terms of the *inner* spiritual life. In the words of the late righteous Fr. Seraphim of Platina, "The spiritual life of the true monastic tradition is the *norm* of our Christian life, and we had better be informed of it before the terrible last day when we are called to account for our lax life. We shall not be judged for our ignorance of the vocabulary of contemporary 'Orthodox theology,' but we shall surely be judged for not struggling on the path of salvation. If we do not live like these (monastic) Saints, then let us at least increase our far-too-feeble struggles for God and offer our fervent tears of repentance and our constant self-reproach at falling so short of the standard of perfection which God has shown us in His wondrous (monastic) saints."

These are among the conditions and qualities that, when taken completely at face value and literally, have brought many monks and nuns to sainthood, and it is precisely all *this* that we celebrate on this Sunday. In the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.