



## **Sunday of All Saints**

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

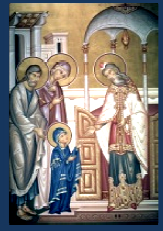
On this Sunday on the *secular* calendar we observe Father's Day, a worthy non-Church celebration. But let this not overshadow the liturgical feast we keep on this Sunday: *All Saints Day*.

Last week we celebrated Pentecost Sunday, when the Third Person of the Holy Trinity, the Holy Spirit, descended upon the Church—which consisted of the apostles, disciples, and the Theotokos—in the Upper Room in Jerusalem. That Pentecost “event” was not just a pious fable or a symbol or a metaphor. It was the actual “indwelling” of God the Holy Spirit in the Christian Church, beginning on that day and continuing to our very own. And what is the “fruit” of Pentecost? Simply this: the huge harvest of saints, of holy men and women—beginning with the apostolic Church and continuing into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, yes to our very own time.

What is a “saint”? Because our very debased culture tends to portray saints as “holier-than-thou”, “goody two-shoes” types, it's important for us as Orthodox Christians to understand what *the Church* has always understood by the term “saint.” We must allow the last two thousand years of the Church's experience to explain this to us, rather than our degraded entertainment media or some non-Orthodox Church.

In Protestantism, generally, it is believed that anyone who has accepted Christ as Lord and Savior is already saved and is a saint, because the early Christians were always referred to in the Book of Acts and the Epistles as saints. This, however, betrays a lack of knowledge of the first Christians and their times. Those initial believers gave themselves over so completely and fully to Christ that their lives were absolutely, magnificently, and completely changed. They were “*living saints*”—something very different from people that came later or who call themselves Christians today, yet continue to live in a sinful lifestyle, with bad habits, negative outlooks, and vices, no matter how small. Those early Christians were indeed saints. They turned completely away from themselves and turned in the direction of Christ God *exclusively*. Christians today are not in the same category at all.

And then there is the Roman Catholic understanding of sainthood, which has generally evolved and changed over the centuries, reflecting different streams of thought in Western culture and civilization as society has developed or gone downhill. At the present time and for about a generation, most of the men and women in Catholicism who are beatified or canonized by the Pope—for example Mother Teresa of Calcutta—were elevated to the honors of their Church because of their fine social work and outreach. Of course there's nothing at all wrong with social work and outreach, if one has been called to do that. Also, many Catholic



saints are the founders of religious orders for men and women—in other words, very talented organizers and leaders--, and this is also a good thing. But all of this differs from the standards the Holy Fathers of Orthodoxy—both ancient and today—who have always upheld for sainthood in the Eastern Orthodox Church.

Of course in both Catholicism and Orthodoxy a saint is primarily someone who is now in heaven. But it is the qualifications for sainthood in each Church that differs in some ways. Basically, for us Orthodox, sainthood means that an individual attained a very high level of holiness in this lifetime, and holiness, in this context, *means sharing in the very holiness of the Lord God Almighty Himself*. Also, holiness is a special gift or, to use the correct Greek term, “charisma”, which God Himself gives to a man or a woman who has prepared and opened his soul, his mind, and his heart unconditionally and fully to God.

Of course all of us are called by God to be saints—that is, to be holy, sanctified. This is, in fact, the purpose, and the *main* purpose of our life here on earth. You see, our main purpose is not to be good businessmen—though there’s nothing wrong with that—or good teachers, or good priests, or good writers, or good anything else. Our primary destiny is to live with God in most intimate union, forever, and ever, and ever, beginning in this life.

The Holy Trinity gives all of us, each and every one, exactly the amount of grace that we need to become saints even while we live here on earth. He does not give saints like St. Nektarios or St. John of San Francisco a different grace or more grace than He gives us. It’s the same for all. The difference is how we make use of that grace, whether or not we make use of it to come to holiness in our lives, or whether we waste it.

According to the website of the Greek Archdiocese, the Holy Fathers of the Church understand sainthood to fall into the following general categories:

First, **The Apostles**, who were the first ones to spread the message of the Incarnation of the Word of God and of salvation through Christ.

Second, **The Prophets**, because they predicted and prophesied the coming of the Messiah.

Thirdly, **The Martyrs**, who sacrificed their lives by confessing Christ.

Fourth, **The Fathers and Hierarchs of the Church**, who excelled in explaining and in defending, by word and deed, the Christian faith.

Fifth, **The Monastics**, who have dedicated themselves to spiritual exercise reaching, as far as possible, perfection in Christ.

June 19, 2011

# Sunday Sermon

Fr Ambrose Young  
Entrance of the Theotokos Skete



And finally, **The Just**, those who lived in the world, leading exemplary lives as clergy or laity with their families, becoming examples for imitation.

Each and every one among all these saints has his or her own calling and characteristics: they all fought the "good fight for the faith" (1 Tim. 6: 12 and 2 Tim. 4: 7). All of them applied in their lives the scriptural virtues of "justice, piety, fidelity, love, fortitude, and gentleness" (1 Tim. 6: 11).

Furthermore, we Orthodox believe that "the ultimate goal of the saint is to imitate God and live the life of deification (*theosis*)...turning and looking always towards God, thus achieving total unity with Him through the Holy Spirit.



These, then, are the specific things we remember and think upon on this, the Sunday of All Saints, thanking God for this great "cloud of witnesses" that has been, are, and will be brought forth by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which began on Pentecost. Let us not have it rest there. We should also, today, be thinking that we, too, are called to complete union with Christ God and perfection or deification in the Holy Trinity. Let *that* be our prayer, our hope, and our sworn goal on this Sunday.

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