

Date: June 18, 2022

Subject: 1st Sunday After Pentecost

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Tomorrow we begin the Apostles's Fast which ends on July 12. It is relatively short this year.

MATTHEW 10: 32-33, 37-38, 19: 27-30

Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven.

But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.

He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.

Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?

And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life.

But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first.

Last week we witnessed the descent of the Holy Spirit on the apostles and those gathered together with them. This descent marked the birth of Christ's Church on earth. And immediately, we witnessed the first fruits of the Church. When we first saw them, we saw simple, uneducated, and somewhat cowardly men who did not stand out in any way. But when they were filled with the Grace of the Holy Spirit, they were instantly and radically changed. They became fearless, profound theologians, miracle workers, and spiritual conquerors of the civilized world. The arrogantly powerful and highly educated pagan empire, which had subjugated the world, could not stand up to them, and crumbled.

After witnessing the first fruits of newly born Church last week, this Sunday, through the celebration of the memory of all saints, we are given a powerful witness to the fact that the Church was established in order to empower all people, throughout all time, with the means by which they can be saved. Despite being persecuted from Her birth (some of these persecutions were demonically severe) the Church survived, still lives, and continues to save multitudes of people. The Church is and will always be eternal as revealed by Jesus when he stated: *I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*

Why does the Church celebrate the memory of all the saints? The saints were born in the same condition in which we are all born in. They were not born with any special or superior qualities and power. They had the same human strengths and weaknesses that we all have. And they lived during times that were no less difficult, maybe even more difficult than ours. Yet what great spiritual heights they were able to achieve! What holiness! What profound sanctity!

Seeing their exceptional lives, we must ask how they were able to succeed? The response would probably be as follows. It was all done through God's grace, mercy, and help, without which they would have failed. Having such powerful assistance enabled them—through humility, fasting, prayer, and good

deeds—to subdue and overcome all the difficulties and temptations that the devil and the circumstances of their own life threw at them.

It was not an easy thing to do. It took great patience and perseverance. But they loved God, believed in Him, depended on Him, and most of all wanted to please Him. And what is truly amazing is that every time that they sinned, sometimes even severely, God never left them. He always waited for their repentance and accepted it. He always forgave them, no matter how badly they had fallen. And what was even more incredible is that for every step that they took toward Him, He took ten even greater steps to come closer to them.

That is why every year the Church remembers them. Their lives show us that sanctity is something that all of us are able to achieve. It has been achieved throughout history. Even today, we have saints living amongst us, saints who are living the kind of lives that we should be striving to live. They can and should be our true role models and inspiration.

Why then were they able to succeed in what seems to be impossible for us? Probably because we do not love God as much as they did. Probably because we are so attached to our lives in the world that we are not willing to sacrifice and give them up for God's sake. The reason why we can't succeed, therefore, is found in our hearts. What we value the most in our hearts determines what we strive for the most. And sadly, often God winds up in second place in our hearts.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, may the memory of all the saints that we celebrate on Sunday open our hearts more widely to God. We may never achieve sainthood. But salvation should be what we all truly want and are willing to work for. Yes, it could prove to be a difficult and, at times, an uncomfortable road to transverse. Yes, it probably means changing, maybe even drastically, the way that we live and conduct our personal affairs.

But consider what happens when we reach the end of our sojourn through our earthly life. Will our eternity then be one of total darkness and misery? Or will it be full of light and blessedness? Will it be together with our Savior, and all of His angels, and saints? Or will it be amongst terrifying demons? The choice is ours. Therefore, let the memory of the saints be the inspiration that strengthens us in our spiritual life to begin and persevere it in a truly God pleasing way.

ALL SAINTS, PRAY TO GOD FOR US SINNERS!

With Much Love in Christ,
Archpriest Serge Kotar