

“SEEK FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS”

By Metropolitan Hilarion Alfeyev

1st Sunday after Pentecost, All Saints

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“Joy of All Who Sorrow”

What are we reminded of on the day when we celebrate the memory of All Saints? What do these people have in common, who lived during various epochs of history, who carried out various ministries, who spoke different languages, and who lived differently and died differently?

Among the saints who, throughout the ages, have been pleasing to God, were martyrs, luminaries, venerable ones, righteous princes and fools-for-Christ. They pleased God in various ways: some He placed on the candlestick of Church service, some were called to defend Orthodoxy, others were called to confess the name of Christ, to follow Christ without fear of death. Some the Lord placed in high public service, entrusting them with secular power and responsibility for the fate of the people, and in this service they followed the path of Christian good works. God instilled in the hearts of others love for monasticism and the hermetic way of life: they left the world, went into the deserts, and there, in solitude and alone with God, wept for their sins and prayed for their neighbors and for the entire world. Each saint had his or her own personal spiritual struggle, but in bearing their struggles, they remained faithful to God to the end — they did not turn back, did not turn off the straight and narrow path, and they never preferred the human over the Divine. Each of them put God and Divine righteousness first in their lives, and everything else was tied to and connected with this.

Of course, the most important thing that we can say about the people who we glorify on this day, to whom we pray and who we depict on the holy icons: they gave everything to God, and God, likewise, gave everything to them in return. You see how often we want to give God only a part of ourselves, only a portion of what belongs to us. This is what we think: “I have a week to dedicate to my affairs, and two hours on Sunday morning — for God.” Some add two hours more Saturday evenings, in order to be in church for the All Night Vigil, and some — a half hour in the morning and in the evening for daily prayers. Thus, it is perhaps about five or eight hours a week that we dedicate to God. And the Lord waits for us to dedicate our entire lives to Him, for us to listen to his invitation that we hear at every Divine Liturgy, that we would “commend ourselves and each other, and all our life unto Christ our God.”

It is necessary to remember: when we give everything to God, we receive everything from Him in return. “Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well” (Mt. 6:33). The experience of the saints shows: when a person dedicates his entire self to God, the Lord grants unto him the gift of special and abundant grace.

How many times, when reading the life of one or another saint, we see that it was not by means of human powers that these God-pleasers accomplished the things that they did in the short period of time which was allotted to them. And we ask ourselves, “How was this possible?” The answer to this question is the following: a person cannot follow the path of sanctity by his own powers, but if he strives for this, if he desires to dedicate his entire self to God, dedicate all his labors to Him, to not only just think about Him in church or during prayers at home, but orders his entire life so that God would be present in every aspect of it, then the Lord grants to this person extraordinary grace and special powers for the service to which he has been called.

In order to devote oneself to God, it is not necessary to stand round-the-clock in prayer, for this is impossible. And when the apostle Paul says: “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17), he doesn’t mean that we should forsake all activities and quit our jobs and 24 hours a day read prayers, taking a break, perhaps, only for sleep and food. The apostle is saying that we should order our lives in such a way so that all of our activities and all of our thoughts would be tuned to the same wavelength — the Kingdom of God and His righteousness; everything, that we do, we must do with devotion to God and pray to Him and ask for His blessing before undertaking

any activity. Then this prayer will itself help us to see the line between good and evil, between what we should do and what not to do. The Lord Himself, by His grace, will instruct and assist us.

Praying today to all the saints who have pleased God throughout the ages, among whom each of us has a saint of God whose name we bear, and to whom we turn to for help, let us pray that we will follow the path of righteousness and learn to devote our entire life to God. For this reason the Lord brought us into the world, and only that life which is dedicated to God is full, the life which is dedicated not partially or temporarily, but completely in every aspect and in every way, entirely to God.

Translated from the Russian by Archpriest Peter Olsen