

SERMON ON ALL SAINTS SUNDAY, June 3, 2018

Last Sunday we celebrated the birthday of the Church and the reception of the gift of the Holy Spirit. With this gift comes great expectation and responsibility. It takes great struggles and much work on our part in order for the benefits of the gift of the Holy Spirit to be made manifest within us. Today we remember all of those righteous ones, known and unknown, who responded to God's gift with great labors of prayer, fasting repentance, love, humility and almsgiving. As a result, the grace of the Holy Spirit blossomed and burst forth within these sanctified souls. As the Holy Apostle Paul writes, we celebrate today a "cloud of witnesses" who were sanctified by the grace of Holy Spirit: Apostles, Prophets, Martyrs, Righteous Ones, Holy Hierarchs, Evangelists, Holy Ascetics, Holy Mothers, Holy Fathers and all of the Holy and righteous Confessors of the faith who received celestial crowns for their righteous labors. To honor a saint is to imitate the life of the saint. Therefore we are all baptized with the name of a saint whose life it behooves us to learn and to try to imitate in our own daily lives. In addition, we learn about the lives of all the saints, that we may glean inspiration and a practical understanding of how we must apply in our own daily lives the precepts of the Holy Gospel. The world around us is like a turbulent sea. Out in the midst of this stormy and dangerous sea is a ship. On this ship are many people who are dancing, drinking, playing games, sleeping and engaging in all sorts of sins. On the shore are the faithful Orthodox Christians. On the shore are those who heed the words of our Lord when He says, "Any one who is ashamed of me in this sinful and adulterous generation, of him will I also be ashamed before my Father in the Kingdom of Heaven." On the shore are the faithful Orthodox Christians who love God more than anything else, more than even mother, father, husband, wife or even our children, realizing that all of these are a gift and a blessing from God. The Orthodox Christians stare in amazement at this rocking and swaying boat in the midst of a wild and stormy sea and the Christians wonder how it is that these people in the ship are oblivious to the danger surrounding them. Those on the shore cry out to them and try to warn them. The Christians cry out, "Wake up! Don't be unjust! Don't sin!" But these people do not hear or heed the warnings because, as our Savior says, "having ears they do not hear, and having eyes they do not see." Ultimately the ship will perish in the waves of the storm and only then as the people are drowning will they cry out to be saved, and then it will be too late. The Lord warns us that in the end times people will be merry making, marrying and living their lives oblivious to the deluge that awaits them. So it was in the time of Noah when the flood came and everyone who was not in the saving ark drowned and perished, so it will be in the end times when those who are not in the saving ark of the Church will drown and perish. Although we are weak and sinful, we are called upon to remain faithful to the Orthodox Christian faith, to remain in the Holy Church, and to live a life of repentance and mourning for our sins. The world may rejoice and laugh and make merry, but for Christians there is affliction and sorrow because we see that we are living in such an age of apostasy and lack of faith. In addition, we see our own passions, our own shortcomings and there is sorrow because of this. No where is it written "Blessed are they who laugh and rejoice in their laughter." Our Lord said, "Blessed are those who mourn. Blessed are those who sorrow because of their passions, sins and short-comings. Our Savior said, "the world will make merry and go its own way, but you my disciples will mourn. But the hour will come when I will return and appear to the world. And you who are my faithful disciples will rejoice in that day and you will know joy which is greater than any joy that the world may know, and no one will be able to take that joy away from you." Behold how we are called upon by the Lord to be witnesses by our way of life, to witness by struggling to keep the commandments of God. We are called upon to bear witness even as the Holy Apostles, Prophets, Martyrs and all those faithful Christians who lived in evil times bore witness to the faith. Our Savior promises us that if we remain faithful unto the end, we shall receive a hundred- fold for our humble and sincere labors. We will inherit celestial crowns and stand in the ranks with al, of those Holy Luminaries that we remember today. If we remain faithful to our Holy Baptism and to the grace of the gift of the Holy Spirit which has been entrusted to us,

then we will inherit eternal life. On that final day we will hear, "Well done, my faithful servant, come and take rest in the joy which has been prepared for you since the beginning of time." May we all remain steadfast and loyal to the truth, to righteousness, to purity and may we all remain faithful until the very end. Amen.