

**ALL SAINTS OF NORTH AMERICA AND RUSSIA**  
**Matthew 4:25-5:12**  
**By Archpriest Peter Olsen**  
**St. Basil's Russian Orthodox Church, Watervliet, NY, June 18, 2023**

We are still in the season when we are celebrating the Descent of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples of our Savior. Last Sunday we remembered all saints, known and unknown. Today we celebrate local regional saints, who for us are the saints of North America. In some OCA churches we also remember all the saints of Russia, because our mother church was the Russian Orthodox Church, from whom we received our autocephaly in 1970.

Our veneration of the saints does not lessen the greatness or magnitude of God. In everything we follow the teaching and instructions of our Savior and the Holy Apostles. We venerate the saints as the faithful friends and servants of God. They made themselves into “temples of the Holy Spirit” — “the temple of God” (1 Cor. 6:11-19). We venerate and glorify their works and struggles, which they accomplished for the glory of God, by the power of the Holy Spirit and the grace of God. Therefore, all honor which is rendered to the saints is ascribed to God Himself. Glorifying the saints, we exclaim, “Wondrous is God in His saints!” (Psalm 68:36).

The Lord Jesus Christ Himself confirmed the commandment, “You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve,” (Luke 4:8, Deut. 6:13) when He said “You are my friends if you do what I command you” (John 15:14). The Lord testified before them, “He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives him who sent me.” (Matt. 10:40), which proves that the honor rendered to the Lord’s faithful servants is ascribed to God. We are *all* called to be holy. The Lord is perfect God and perfect man. In His humanity He experienced every temptation, emotion and feeling that we experience, yet He never sinned. The saints also bear witness to the fact that it is not too difficult or impossible to keep the commandments of God and to make our bodies into “temples of the Holy Spirit.” The Lord said, “In my Father’s house are many mansions” (John 14:2). Thus, although we may not achieve the sanctity of a St. John of Kronstadt or a St. Nektarios of Pentapolis, through our sincere and humble efforts and tears of repentance we may be deemed worthy of a place in the Kingdom of Heaven. The holiest of the saints sincerely considered themselves to be unworthy of the gifts and mercies of God.

Orthodox Christianity came to North America after the Russians colonized Alaska in 1783. Churches were built, and the first Russian Orthodox missionaries arrived at Kodiak Island, off the Alaskan mainland, in August of 1794. The first mission had a two-fold purpose: to give spiritual service to the men of the Russian Trading Company, and to evangelize the native Alaskans. Orthodoxy flourished and soon spread to all parts of Alaska. In 1815 a church was built in Sitka which became the first cathedral of the first Russian Orthodox Diocese on the American continent. St. Innocent (Veniaminoff) became the first bishop of this Diocese. He later returned to Russia where he was chosen to serve as Metropolitan of Moscow. As true disciples of Christ, the Russians brought the light of the Gospel with sensitivity and respect for the various languages and the beauty of the cultures of the various native ethnicities which make up the Alaskan people. It is this Christian love and sensitivity, I believe, which was the basis of the success of the Russian Mission to the Native peoples of Alaska. Sadly, the sale of Alaska to the United States, and later the Bolshevik Revolution, resulted in circumstances which led to catastrophic harm to the seeds of Orthodox Christianity which were successfully planted and cultivated by the early Russian missionaries. You can read about these circumstances in detail in the tract “A Call For Help for the Church in Alaska” by His Grace Bishop Alexei (Trader) of Sitka and Alaska.

In 1871 the Diocesan headquarters was transferred to San Francisco. When St. Tikhon became the Russian Orthodox Bishop in America, the Episcopal See was transferred to NYC, where St. Nicholas Cathedral, a NYC landmark, was built in 1901. In 1905 Archbishop Tikhon founded St. Tikhon’s, the first Orthodox Monastery in America. An orphanage was also

established. Tikhon founded the first seminary in Minneapolis in 1905, which relocated to Tenafly, NJ in 1912. The Russian Mission suffered financially and in many other ways after the Bolshevik Revolution. Eventually the seminary in Tenafly relocated to NYC and then closed in the 1920's. In 1938 St. Vladimir's Seminary and St. Tikhon's Seminary were established. Archbishop Tikhon later returned to Russia where he was consecrated as Patriarch of Moscow and All Rus, and bore witness as a martyr during the turbulent Bolshevik Revolution and the persecution which ensued. In the 1880's, under the leadership of St. Alexis Toth, a former Uniate priest, many Uniate parishes returned to the Orthodox Christian faith.

Among the saints venerated in North America are St. Innocent, St. Alexis Toth, and St. Tikhon, already mentioned. Saints from the original Alaskan mission include Hieromartyr Juvenaly, the martyr St. Peter the Aleut, and St. Herman, who lived as a hermit monk on Spruce Island. Also glorified among the American saints are St. Raphael Hawaweeny, who was born in Lebanon and studied at the Kiev Theological academy. He was sent by Tsar Nicholas II to serve the Arabic Orthodox population in America as Bishop of Brooklyn of the Russian American Missionary Diocese. His relics are interred at the Antiochian Village in Ligonier, PA. We also venerate St. Nicholaj of Ziča, a Serbian bishop and scholar who was a professor at St. Tikhon's Seminary. He was known as the "Serbian Chrysostom" because of his eloquent preaching and writings. We also venerate the wonder-worker St. John Maximovitch of San Francisco, a great ascetic and spiritual giant. His incorrupt relics are enshrined in his cathedral in San Francisco. Holy Saints of North America, and All Saints of Russia pray unto God for us! Amen!



**JOHN OF SAN FRANCISCO**



**TIKHON OF N. AMERICA**



**ALEXIS TOTH**



**NIKOLAJ OF ZIČA**



**RAPHAEL OF BROOKLYN**



**INNOCENT OF ALASKA**