

SERMON ON THE SUNDAY OF ALL SAINTS, JUNE 14, 2020

Last, Sunday, the great Feast of Pentecost, is often referred to as the birthday of the Church. Why? Because on that day the Holy Spirit which mankind had lost because of the fall of Adam and Eve was restored to us. The final event which was lacking in all the acts which inaugurated the new and final Covenant and the establishment of the Church was when the Father sent to the Christian community the Holy Spirit. There is no Church without the Holy Spirit. There are no Mysteries (or Sacraments) without the Holy Spirit. In a word, there is no salvation without the gift of the Holy Spirit. All of the saving and sacrificial acts of our Lord Jesus Christ (the incarnation, the sufferings, His passion and His glorification on the the Cross, the Resurrection, the Ascension) prepared the way for us to receive the Holy Spirit. All of the saving acts of the Lord prepared the path for us to take up our cross and to follow Him on our journey in this life in order to imitate Him and to follow His commandments that we might ultimately be deemed worthy to be received into the Kingdom of heaven. Our Lord labored on our behalf. Now it is our turn to do our part. Now we must work and we must struggle. Unless we willingly take up and carry our own cross we cannot truly follow Him and we cannot receive all the great gifts which our merciful Lord has prepared for us. In the words of Holy Scripture, it says that when we struggle we become actual participants in the Lord's crucifixion. St. Seraphim of Sarov revealed in his wonderful conversation with Nicholas Motovilov that the purpose of life is to acquire the Holy Spirit. You might ask, "Don't we receive the Holy Spirit when we are baptized? Don't we receive the Holy Spirit when we receive Holy Communion? Don't we receive the Holy Spirit when we receive Holy Unction?" The answer to all those questions is yes. However, the gift of the Holy Spirit that we receive is like a spark within us. In order for that spark to grow and to eventually become a great conflagration, it must be fanned, nurtured and fed with fuel. It must be cultivated in order to grow. Otherwise it will diminish and decrease in strength and in size. That is where our work, our struggles come in. We must struggle in order to make the Holy Spirit grow and thrive within us. It takes struggle and work, hard work, if done properly, to pray, fast, repent, keep the commandments of God, study the Word of God, have love, forgiveness and purity in our hearts, and to make our bodies, as the Apostle Paul says, worthy vessels like little Temples within which the Holy Spirit may dwell. When we sin, when we disobey the Commandments of God, when we neglect the spiritual life and run after carnal and earthly pleasures, the light of the Holy Spirit within us becomes dimmed and almost unrecognizable, buried and covered in darkness by our dark, neglectful and evil ways. When St. Seraphim says that the purpose of our life is to acquire the Holy Spirit, he means that we must live the life in Christ and not neglect our spiritual life so that the Holy Spirit may grow within us. The more the Holy Spirit grows within us the more sanctified we become, in other words, the "holier" we become. The word "saint" in English means "holy." Saint in Greek is "agios," it means holy. Saint in Russian is "sviatoy," it means holy. If last Sunday we celebrated the sending to the Church of the Holy Spirit, then today we celebrate the natural and logical outcome of that event, which is that through struggle, with God's help, Christians become sanctified and become holy, or saints. We celebrate today all the saints of the Church, past, present and future, those whose lives we know and whose names we know, as well as the countless saints whose names and lives which are unknown to us. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are many, and the individual struggles of the saints are diverse. We have saints who were married and those who were monastics, we have saints who were teachers and others who were prophets. We have saints who gave up their lives on account of Christ and have become martyrs. The saints have come from all walks of life. Some were famous soldiers and generals, others were humble farmers. Some were princes and kings and some were paupers. They came from all the nations and from all the ends of the earth. Some saints were already sanctified as children, and others, such as Mary of Egypt, lived dissolute and impure lives, and through great struggles achieved the greatest heights of sanctity imaginable. The gift of the Holy Spirit, the gift of holiness, is open to all. When the priest elevates the chalice and the diskos during the Divine Liturgy, he says "on behalf of all and for all." It us up

to us to choose and to decide. In conclusion, Brothers and Sisters, let us hearken to the words which were once spoken by St. Herman of Alaska in a conversation which he had with the officers of a Russian ship: "For our good, for our happiness," concluded the Elder, "at least let us give a vow to ourselves, that from this day, from this hour, from this minute, we shall strive above all else to love God and to do His Holy Will!" Amen!

~ **Archpriest Peter Olsen**