

SERMON - ST. JOHN MAXIMOVITCH JULY 2, 2017

Perhaps Hollywood movies are partially to blame, but we often have a one-sided idea of what the saints were like in their earthly lives, and forget that they did not always enjoy the continued love and respect of everyone around them. We forget that spiritual love is quite different from earthly love, and what is beneficial to us is not always what is most pleasant and comfortable. Although we can allow that there are times when a tender pat on the head is not what is needed, the modern educational theory is to coddle and be coddled. The rod has become a thing to be spared; and anyway, how can a person rebuke another for “doing wrong” when the very concept has become hopelessly outdated, stretched beyond all recognition, and highly subjective?

Sanctity is more than good deeds, or a good personality, or even good morals; it is the acquisition of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God. We may not always understand its workings, and its action upon us may not be “comfortable.” We cannot truly venerate the saints if we do not accept this fact, because as our Lord said, *Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.* St. John was by no means a narrow-minded fanatic, and there are countless examples that disprove such an accusation. But we can see from his homilies and sermons and from the accounts of people who knew him that he was stern and unyielding on matters of the faith. Vladika condemned the sin of people who do not base their convictions and way of life upon the teaching of the Orthodox Faith, but strive to make the rules and teachings of the Orthodox Church agree with their own habits and desires. Vladika preached cleansing of sins through suffering. Vladika was intolerant toward spiritual indifference. Vladika lived and practiced what he taught. Vladika used to say that the saints are living examples of people who were like us, but they still made it. Vladika was himself such a living example. He was attacked and persecuted because he was a saint, but he returned good for evil.

Vladika John is a saint whose extraordinary life touched people of our own time. There are still people living who knew him personally. Therefore, a very clear picture has emerged of this unearthly man that leaves no doubt - as the Holy Orthodox Church has confirmed by his glorification on July 2, 1994 - that he was a wonderworker, a clairvoyant, a saint of God. He was genuine, he was the real deal. His love of God and people was so strong that he literally gave himself no rest, for he was continually engaged in prayer and service without reserving anything for himself. All his words and deeds were full of God’s truth. His selfless love kept his mind always attentive to peoples’ suffering, and his boldness before God wrought countless miracles of healing and salvation. Metropolitan Antony (Khrapovitsky), the first hierarch of the Russian Church Abroad, said this about Vladika John: “In our times of world-wide spiritual weakening, this frail little man, well-nigh a child in appearance, comes forth as a miracle of ascetic steadfastness and strictness.” Vladika John prayed all the time. Vladika John prayed everywhere. It was not without reason that Hieromonk Methodius, then in Harbin and also of a spiritual mentality, made the subtle remark, “we all start praying, but for Vladika John there is no need to “start” praying; he is always in a prayerful state of mind.” And no matter what changes occurred in the external surroundings and external life and work of Vladika John, the matter of prayer and service to God was always in the first place. Nothing could tear him away from this. A man of prayer, his was an archpastor caring for human souls and always ready to help, imparting the grace of God to his spiritual children and anyone one else who was suffering and in need of help. Those closest to him who experienced the power of his prayers will always carry in their hearts a grateful memory of that warmth and radiance which he gave them. Such was our Vladika John. Through the prayers of our Vladika, St. John, may our souls be saved! Amen!