

### **SERMON on the New-Martyrs and Confessors of Russia, Sunday, January 27, 2019**

Today we celebrate the memory of the New-Martyrs and Confessors of Russia. Hatred against Christ and His followers should not surprise us. It was foretold by the Lord Himself, who said: "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you" (John 15:18). The Lord forewarned us that we should not be tempted if we are to suffer for Him. It is not only the martyrs who suffered, but all serious Christians who sincerely and seriously try to follow in Christ's footsteps, who truly try to be his disciples, also suffer, each in our own way, on account of Christ and our faith in Him. If we are weak in faith, doubt may creep in and we may doubt the power of our Savior. If the Lord had given us eternal life on earth, preserved us from persecution and suffering, many multitudes would eagerly follow Him. But how would they follow Him? Not from love, but for their own advantage, from a utilitarian point of view. Any free will for mankind would be excluded. Free will bears witness to God and to truth, for God and truth are synonymous. That is why those who hate God also hate free will. Societies who prefer sin to virtue, who prefer immorality to living a pure life, who prefer material gain instead of spiritual gain, fear and hate expressions of the free will of man. Ideology is dictated and forced upon the citizens of such a society in a dictatorial, savage and brutal way. Russia was such a society when Godless atheists ruled the land. The Communists preached an earthly utopia where everyone would live in equality and harmony. The reality is that what the Communists practiced was oppression, cruelty, fear and severe persecution. We are recognized as the Lord's disciples from the love which we have for each other. This love is founded upon love for God. What kind of love would it be if it were the result of force? Evil in this world so surrounds the person who has left God as the source of love, that such a person despises all that is Divine, and first of all God-bearers and Christ-bearers, that us, those who truly fulfill love for God, for Christ, those who fulfill His commandments by their free will and love for Him. The very sight of a righteous man is intolerable for the sinner. Evil becomes their god. In John 16:2 our Savior said: "...whoever kills you will think that he is offering service to God." A life of good deeds of a Christian shames the filthy life of a lover of sin. The Lord Himself foretold: "If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you" (John 15:20), and moreover, they shall "cast out your name as evil" (Luke 6:22), and "you will be hated by all for my name's sake" (Luke 21:17). We must prepare ourselves for struggle if we love Christ. If we take the name of "Christian," we must carry this name with dignity and not take it lightly. Only in such a state will we be able to accept the sufferings that will come our way. When the Godless atheists rose up against the Church and her faithful, the Russian Orthodox answered "For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20). They bore witness not only in word but by their lives, of Him who gave them life, Christ. The Holy New-Martyrs and Confessors knew the power of Christ, they saw the truth and could not hide it. They endured the sufferings and tribulations, sometimes in silence, and sometimes rebuking and denouncing their torturers. True Christian zeal pays no heed to threats or danger, true Christian zeal is aimed at one thing only: to speak the truth, clearly and plainly so that all may understand. The blood of the New-Martyrs and Confessors of Russia displayed the beauty and power of the Russian church. In Russia today Orthodoxy has emerged "like beauty for ashes" (Isaiah 61:3) from the catacombs and once again Orthodoxy shines triumphantly and openly in all Rus. Magnificent cathedrals and monasteries, destroyed by the Communists, are being rebuilt and filled with countless faithful Russian Orthodox Christians. As Orthodoxy emerges from the ashes and rebuilds herself in Russia, Christianity remains the most persecuted religion in the world. It is astounding how few Americans realize and know about this. Read the book "The Global War on Christians" by John L. Allen, Jr. Christianity has almost been obliterated from the Holy Land, and throughout the Middle East Christians are suffering persecution and martyrdom while holy churches, monasteries and shrines are being systematically destroyed. Through the prayers and intercessions of the Holy New-Martyrs and Confessors of Russia, as well as the New-Martyrs and Confessors of Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Middle East, Eastern Europe and throughout the world, may our souls be saved! Amen.