

Last week the Church celebrated the Feast of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came down upon the Disciples of Christ, just as He had promised. The Holy Spirit dwelt with our Lord's disciples and apostles as they went throughout the world teaching the nations and baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Today, the Church honors all the saints, known and unknown. The Church honors all those who because of their faith in Christ struggled for the Church. The Church honors its saints because it is through them that the world recognizes her identity. The Saints are "the light of the world". It is through their sacrifice, their confession, and their love for Christ, that the world sees the True Church which is the Body of Christ. The Saints reveal to all of mankind the purpose of the Church. The Church's purpose, her role is to make all of us holy. The Church's purpose is to make all of us saints.

Why is it that the Church celebrates and honors all of its Saints today, the Sunday after Pentecost? Because, it was only with the grace of the All-Holy Spirit that these special people who we honor today became saints. The celebration and the honor of the Church's Saints is a continuation of the celebration of the feast of Pentecost and the Holy Spirit.

From the beginning, the Holy Spirit, one of the Holy Trinity, has dwelt with man, and especially with those who were receptive to His grace. In the beginning it was the Spirit of God that moved over the waters. It was the Holy Spirit, using a dove, who showed Noah that the floods had ceased. It was the Holy Spirit that enlightened King David to write the psalms. It was the Holy Spirit that entered into Mary and made her the Theotokos. Elizabeth was filled with this same Holy Spirit who revealed to her that she was visited by the Lord.

And it is this same Holy Spirit, after the Feast of Pentecost, that has dwelt with all the Saints and made them Evangelists, Apostles, Teachers, Martyrs, Confessors, and Wonderworkers. It is this same Holy Spirit, whose gifts we receive when we are baptized and become members of the Church of Christ. The Holy Spirit, who ordains priests, fills all of Christ's members with the gifts of Grace.

When God created man, He created him in His image and likeness. St. Maximos the Confessor says that: "God made us so that we might become partakers of the divine nature, so that we might become like Him". We have been created in God's image. And through the Mystery of Holy Baptism we can become like Him through Divine Grace of the Holy Spirit. It is our purpose in life. It is why God gave us life. He made us so we can be like Him, so we can share His glory, so we can become saints.

Can we become saints? Many of us have read many of the lives from the saints. Are the saints any different from us? Was St. James the Persian any different from us when he was persuaded and influenced by the pleasures of the world to denounce Christ? Was he any different from us when he needed to be scolded by his wife and mother to realize that he made a grave mistake and then confessed Christ until his martyrdom and death? Was St. John the Hut-dweller any different from us when, as a monk, missed his parents and longed to see them?

All the saints were people just like us. They all had flaws. They all made mistakes. They all had sins and all of them had passions. But they put all of that behind them and made every effort to do that which was pleasing to God. And through the grace of the All-Holy Spirit, they became Saints of the Church.

All of us here, at the day of our baptism, have become temples of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit dwells within us. Therefore, all of us can become saints. We might not be able to become an evangelist, or a teacher, or a martyr, or a wonderworker. These things only God knows, because they come from God. However, all of us, every single one of us, can be a confessor of the Church.

What is it that makes us Christian? What is it that makes us Orthodox? It is our confession of faith. To be Orthodox means to be a confessor. If we are to follow God's purpose for us, if we are to fulfill the Church's purpose for us, we must become true confessors.

We have a difficult struggle ahead of us. The world today is filled many antichrists. False religions are popular. A hedonistic life is encouraged. People are worshipping the idols of materialism. Schools and psychologists are trying to teach our children things that are against nature and against God. All of us here are attacked six days of the week by these antichrists. For one Sunday a week we are safe. Every Sunday we leave the world and enter a heavenly world. But what do we do the rest of the days of the week?

We become confessors of Christ and of the faith. This is what makes us Orthodox. We struggle through hardships "always keeping the confession of faith in Christ in its integrity, complete and unchanged". We "cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit" (II Cor. 7:1). We flee from all sin-hate, jealousy, anger, lust, greed, and pride. We ignore the influences of the world but we also show that we do not agree with them either.

Let us not be embarrassed to live a pure life. Let us not be embarrassed to live modestly. Let us not be afraid to do our cross in public. Let us not be afraid to fast these next three weeks even though our friends are having barbeques.

Let us not be afraid to teach our children things that might seem different but things that are pure. Let us not be afraid to remove our children from classes or lessons in school that do not agree with our faith and our morals. Let us not be afraid to limit the television that our children watch.

Let us not be afraid to prohibit our children from playing sports during Sunday mornings when the Divine Liturgy is celebrated.

Let us not be afraid to learn more about our faith. Let us not be afraid to protect our beliefs, even against these antichrists.

Saint Paul urges us saying, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, well-pleasing to God, your rational worship. And cease being fashioned according to this age, but be transfigured by the renewing of your mind, in order for you to put to the test what is the good and well-pleasing and perfect will of God” (Rom. 12:1,2).

Our Savior said in today’s Gospel: “Everyone therefore who shall confess in Me before men, I also will confess in him before My Father Who is in the heavens” (MT 10:32). If we confess Christ, if we confess in Christ, before men, then Christ will confess us before our Father. We will become confessors of the faith and saints of the church. Let us honor the saints that the church commemorates today by imitating them and present our bodies and souls as an offering to God the Holy Spirit,  
AMEN.