

HOMILY AT ST. MATTHEW ORTHODOX CHURCH

JUNE 19, 2022 ALL SAINTS DAY

**HEBREWS 11:33-12:2
MATTHEW 10:32-33, 37-38; 19:27-30**

“THE SAINTS HELP US”

Some years back, St. Theodosius Cathedral in Cleveland had a story in one of their Sunday bulletins..... One day a busy priest was out making visits. It was lunch time so he decided to stop at a diner to get a quick lunch and then get back “on the road”. He grabbed a seat at the counter and, after he made his order, the man next to him, noticing his clergy garb, said, “Father, I never before gave much thought to God or church or anything like that. But I’ve been drawn that way lately. Can you tell me a little about what God is like?” The priest, of course, was glad to do that and began to tell the man about God—about how He was infinite, perfectly loving, perfectly just, patient, forgiving, etc. He had lots of time to describe God to the other fellow as it was taking a long time for his food to come. The priest was in a hurry and started interjecting into his spiritual talk some muttering and complaining about how slow the service was in this diner. Finally, the owner came out of the kitchen and said to everyone there---“Ladies and gentlemen, I am very sorry to tell you we have had a large problem! Our water main broke about a half hour ago. We have tried a quick fix but it won’t work. We will have to have a big repair done and we will have to now close for the day. We just can’t cook without water! I am very sorry but we can’t bring you the food you ordered!” The priest got very upset and said loudly to the owner---“This is ridiculous! I am so busy and so I stopped in here for a very quick lunch—and after I’ve wasted all this time waiting, you tell me there will be no food?

What kind of a greasy spoon outfit are you, anyway? Why don’t you take better care of your plumbing?” And on and on he went, making quite a scene. Everybody headed out the door. The priest and the man he had visited with walked out together. The priest outside got his temper under control and said to the other man----“It was nice to talk to you. Please come by our church Sunday to learn more about God---it’s great that you are so interested in Him now.” The other man said, “Father, after what you did in there, I’m sorry, but I have lost all interest in your God!” The priest walked back to his car very

ashamed of himself, realizing that he could not be a good witness for God if he could not be more consistent in his behavior (“Ambo”, St. Theodosius Cathedral, 5/2/04).

All of us are sometimes at least somewhat like that priest----inconsistent Christians. Often we talk the talk, but don’t walk the walk.

But there *are* consistent Christians. Holy people who are very consistent in their obedience to the Lord. We call them “Saints” with a capital “S”. When we look at a Saint, or learn about a Saint, we get a real glimpse of the holiness, beauty, and love of God.

While in this life, the Saints live totally for God. Then they go on to be with God in the life to come. And each day we Orthodox especially remember and commemorate several Saints. You see their names every day on your church calendar. You hear them commemorated at every service. And today is a special day. Today is All Saints Day. On this particular Sunday, the Sunday after Pentecost, each year we commemorate all the Saints from all time: Old Testament, New Testament, post-Biblical, women, men, children, clergy, laity, great Church Fathers, simple folks, the famous, and anonymous Saints whose names were never recorded. On All Saints Day, today, we commemorate them altogether.

When the Saints were in this world, these consistent folks focused their lives completely on serving God and helping others. Now they have gone to be even closer with the Lord---and they are still helping others “from above”. Today, we will look a bit at how this all works and how we can obtain their help.

The way they help us down here while they are above is through their prayers to God for us. They are certainly not dead, they are very much alive. And they are in the presence of God. In Revelations 6, it is said the Saints are right under God’s heavenly altar---you could say they are right at God’s feet. And what do they do there in the presence of God? They do what they spent lots of time doing when they were here----they pray!

And as they pray to God, they don’t forget about us! They pray for us.

Many non-Orthodox Christians don’t believe the way we do about this. Of course, they believe the Saints are with God. And I’m sure they would agree they are praying there. But they see heaven as so distant that there is no connection between the departed Saints and us-----they cannot hear our requests for their prayers. And many would say it’s wrong to ask them for prayer.

But for we Orthodox, it's a natural and logical thing to request the Saints' intercessions for us at the heavenly altar. Let me give you a personal example to break the whole thing down.....

You probably remember how about 4 years ago my wife and I were in a relatively serious car accident 2 blocks from our house. We both were taken to the hospital and I ended up having a couple of surgeries and was not totally "back in commission" for almost 5 months. I'm sure you remember those liturgies where I was serving sitting in a chair for some of the service!

When you get hurt like that, obviously a lot of praying going on! And it happens in layers. As soon as the accident happened and as I was being put in the ambulance, I started praying directly to God.

And then before long, when there started to be contact with family, with friends, with all of you, I asked for your prayers---and you prayed for me in your own prayers and in the church services.

And then I started asking our "heavenly friends", the departed Saints, to pray for me, too.

That's the common pattern-----we have something we need to pray about. 3 levels take place----Prayers straight to God. Asking earthly friends for their prayers. Asking heavenly friends for their prayers. Simple and logical, but, of course, it depends on our belief that heaven is very close, not distant---that it is "in our midst" as Christ said. And it depends on our belief that God allows the Saints to hear our request for prayer.

And because the Saints are so holy, their prayers are especially powerful! St. James, in James 5:16, wrote----"The strong prayers of a righteous man have great effect." The Saints are righteous men and women in the very presence of God---think how powerful and effectual their prayers must be!

So when we need help (don't we always?)---pray directly to God, ask your earthly friends to pray for you, ask your heavenly friends, the Saints, to pray for you. God will let the Saints hear you and they will pray for you!

We ask their prayers in all our worship services. And we should do that in our own personal prayers as well. It's great to use the beautiful written prayers and hymns to do that, but you can do it in a very simple way as well. Let's say you would like St. Peter to pray for you----Just say (or think!) the following---"St. Peter, please pray for me." He will hear you, he will pray for you, and his powerful prayer will help you.

Which Saints should we ask prayers from? Well, there are thousands and thousands of them, so the more you ask the better!

Especially, we should all ask most of all the Holy Theotokos to pray for us---who better to ask to pray to Christ for us than His own mother? And ask

Your own personal patron Saint to pray for you. And if you're not sure who your patron Saint is (that happens sometimes) I can help you to either figure it out or select one. And as members of our parish, it is good for all of us to always ask our own special Saint, St. Matthew, for his prayers. And then you can start asking as many other Saints as you wish to help you. After all, the more Saints you ask, the more prayers for you!

The Saints are alive. They are with God. They are praying to God. Why not ask them to pray for you?