

In the name of the Father and of the Son of the Holy Spirit. One God, Amen.

Today is the Sunday in which the Church commemorates all the saints. We heard in today's Epistle, St. Paul describing the lives of the saints in the Old Testament. How many had been persecuted, tortured or killed because they were led by the Holy Spirit and did the will of God.

Although these saints were guided by the Holy Spirit, they were not filled with the Holy Spirit since the spirit had not yet come.

Last Sunday was Pentecost and we commemorated the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the followers of Christ. They were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to proclaim the works of Christ.

We, who have been Baptized and Chrismated, have been filled with the Holy Spirit. We were given a new life. We became members of the Body of Christ. When we were baptized and came up out of the water we were given a white garment to wear. This symbolized that our sins had been forgiven and we no longer had to fear death.

On Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured out on the disciples of Christ. The disciples began to spread the Good News throughout Israel and the whole world. They went wherever the Holy Spirit led them.

In the book of the Acts, the disciples of Christ were often called "saints". St. Paul, writing to the Romans addressed them as "To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints". We also are called to be saints.

I have often heard people say "I don't want to be a saint. I just want to be a good person". I think that this is because people often have a misunderstanding of what a saint is. They think that only those who live in monasteries can be saints. This is not true. For all those who put on Christ through Baptism and were filled with the Holy Spirit through Chrismation can become saints.

What is a saint?

A saint is a consistent Christian. There is nothing beyond following the teachings of Jesus that is required. What is unique about a saint is that he or she keeps the Lord's teachings consistently.

A saint is also someone who remains what they had become at Holy Baptism and Chrismation. All of us became saints at our baptisms. When we came forth from the holy font we were resplendent and without sin, clothed in a garment of righteousness and glory. Saints are those who keep their garments pure and unspotted after their baptism.

Some saints actually did sully their baptismal garments with grievous sins, but then whitened them with the ultimate cleansing bleach, which is the tears of repentance, and so regained their glory, such as St. Mary of Egypt.

How can we keep our garments, that is our souls, pure and unspotted after baptism? We must be aware of what can tarnish our souls.

St. Paul, writing to the Corinthians, tells us:

"I say this: walk by the Spirit, and you will not fulfill the lust of the flesh. What the fallen flesh desires is against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh! And these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you desire...

Now the works of the flesh are obvious. They are: adultery, sexual immorality, impurity, lust, idolatry, the practice of magic, hatred, strife, selfish ambitions, outbursts of anger, rivalries, divisions, heresies, envies, murders, excess drinking, orgies, and similar things.

About these, I warn you, as I have done in the past: those who practice such things will not inherit the Kingdom of God." That is, St. Paul means, they will not be saints.

Being aware of this we must then turn our backs on sinning and seek to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

How do we become filled with the Holy Spirit and be saints? I know that I have sinned. What must I do?

First, we must repent and turn our life around. Then we must begin to acquire the Holy Spirit. How do we acquire the Holy Spirit? Having repented, that is going to Confession, we must also receive the Body and Blood of Christ.

If we receive Holy Communion without repenting of our sins, we do not acquire the Holy Spirit through its reception. Actually, we are worse off than we were if we had not received Holy Communion.

We should always say the Pre-Communion Prayers, which are prayers of repentance. They can be found in your prayer books. Going to Confession is not required prior to receiving Holy Communion, but if we have not received Holy Communion in over 4 weeks we should go to Confession first.

St. Seraphim of Sarov taught about the acquisition of the Holy Spirit. He said:

"The true aim of our Christian life consists of the acquisition of the Holy Spirit of God. As for fasts, vigils, and prayer, and almsgiving, and every good deed done for Christ's sake, are the only means of acquiring the Holy Spirit of God.

Mark my words, only good deeds done for Christ's sake brings us the fruits of the Holy Spirit."

"Jesus, compares our life with the market, and the work of our life on earth He calls trading. He says to us all in Luke: "Trade till I come", and St. Paul in Ephesians "buying up every opportunity, because the days are evil".

In other words, make the most of your time getting heavenly blessings through earthly goods. Earthly goods are good works done for Christ's sake that confer the grace of the All-Holy Spirit, on us."

St. Seraphim also teaches us:

"Of course, every good deed done for Christ's sake gives us the grace of the Holy Spirit, but prayer gives us this grace most of all, for it is always at hand, an instrument for acquiring the grace of the Spirit."

“Prayer is always possible for everyone, rich and poor, noble and humble, strong and weak, healthy and sick, righteous and sinful.”

"You may judge how great the power of prayer is even in a sinful person, when it is offered whole-heartedly, by the following example from Holy Tradition.

When at the request of a desperate mother who had been deprived by death of her only son, a harlot whom she chanced to meet, still unclean from her last sin, and who was touched by the mother's deep sorrow, cried to the Lord:

"Not for the sake of a wretched sinner like me, but for the sake of the tears of a mother grieving for her son and firmly trusting in Thy loving kindness and Thy almighty power, Christ God, raise up her son, O Lord!" And the Lord raised him up...

Great is the power of prayer, and it brings most of all the Spirit of God, and is most easily practiced by everyone. We shall be happy indeed if the Lord God finds us watchful and filled with the gifts of His Holy Spirit.

Then we may boldly hope "to be caught up . . . in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thess. 4:17) Who is coming "with great power and glory" (Mk. 13:26) "to judge the living and the dead" (1 Peter 4:5) and "to reward every man according to his works" (Matt. 16:27)."

The goal of the Christian life is the acquisition of the Holy Spirit! Our Orthodox life is enlivened by the Holy Spirit, and without Him all is empty form and ritual! He is the One Who sanctifies!

He is the One Who works in and with the priest in the Holy Sacraments! He is the goal and purpose of our spiritual disciplines!

Let us remember what the Lord said to His disciples in this morning's Gospel, "Everyone who acknowledges Me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father Who is in heaven; but whoever denies Me before men, I also will deny before My Father Who is in heaven.

He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who does not take his cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me.”

Let us seek to acquire the Holy Spirit. Let us learn to pray constantly. Let us do as our Lord has taught us. Let us love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind and to love our neighbor as ourselves. By doing these things we too will be saints.

When we are filled with the Holy Spirit we begin to bear the fruits of the Spirit. St. Paul tells us in Corinthians that “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness, and self-control.”

As we grow in Christ and are filled more and more with the Holy Spirit these fruits become more visible to those around us. Our families, neighbors, co-workers and those around us will see these fruits blossoming.

Perhaps they may ask us why the change? We can tell them that we have decided to fulfill our calling, that of being Christians. What a wonderful way to evangelize.

We can share what being an Orthodox Christian means and how wonderful it is to be a member of the Body of Christ.

We can share about our Church and what it means to be an Orthodox Christian.

We can invite people to our services and make certain to introduce them to our fellow Orthodox.

Let us all be saints!

Through the prayers of all the saints, Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on us.