

## 7-2-19 St. John of San Francisco Feast Day

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

I can't help but express how enjoyable it is to do a little something different here, for a liturgy, to be on the altar of St. John ... to be sitting on this side of the church. Everything familiar to us, but also new. And in that sense, when we come to this wonderful day, that in the past we would do liturgy on different days, we would try and accommodate people going out to venerate St. John at the cathedral, when at the cathedral they were celebrating his feast day, and then eventually we just realized that we have a life of our own in a sense. We have a unique devotion as a parish, not unique compared to everybody else, but unique in that it is ours, to St. John.

Providentially, I was ordained with the name Thaddeus and we celebrate the Holy Apostle Thaddeus on the same day as St. John and over the years it just became this day that we needed to claim for ourselves here at St. Lawrence and to just simply celebrate and celebrate simply. And on this day, I always want to exhort all of you to remember that we, first of all, we are called to have a relationship with saints.

As Orthodox Christians we don't simply believe in the communion of the saints, but we practice it, we practice it. In the gospel reading that you just heard Christ said, "Those who love me do the words that I have given them. They keep my commandments. Those who do not keep the words that I give you do not love me." And it struck me that this is a fundamental, a single sentence from Christ where we realize that, once again, our faith cannot be something that we think about, it can't be an arrangement of rational conclusions that we have come to or a belief system that we submit to intellectually. That is not be a Christian. Being a Christian is doing what Christ said to do and believing in action, as well as in thought, what Christ taught us and he teaches us the communion of the saints.

We see the saints revealed to him on Mount Tabor, when Moses and Elijah appear with him. Not apparitions, not souls harvested momentarily from Hades to appear with him so that he would be impressive in his transfiguration, but the living Elijah, who was caught up, and the dead, Moses, present with Christ, alive in Christ. As scripture tells us in two different places in two different ways that God is not the God of the dead, he is the God of the living. And from that we realize there are no dead from God's perspective, they're all alive in Him, the righteous.

In another place in scripture it says that God is the God of the living and the dead. Meaning that it doesn't matter if you are alive or if you have reposed, God is your God. And in this we see that we are called to have relationship with the saints just as Christ did himself. Revealed in his transfiguration we see that they are alive in Him, they are his friends and they commune with him, they talk with him. If you read scripture carefully it says He was talking with Moses and Elijah. In the middle of the transfiguration they're having a conversation. Who knows what it was, right? "Wow, it's nice to be back in Jerusalem for a little while. Look at the faces on those holy disciples and apostles of yours." "They'll be okay someday." We don't know.

Most likely they were saying, "Lord Jesus Christ our God, you are the fulfillment of everything we ever believed." Moses saying, "You are the Word that I heard from the burying bush. You are the voice that I met on the mountain. You are the one who inscribed the commandments in the stone. You are the one who visited Abraham and Sarah with the two angels."

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And Elijah saying, "Oh Lord, you fulfilled every promise that you made to me. I preached to the people, some listened and some didn't, but I did it anyways. I followed the words that you gave me and you fulfilled them and you glorified me in your glory because I was obedient to you."

And on this day we look at these very special saints that we have. When we relate to the saints we usually have three different types of saints that we really need to be connected to. The first and foremost is our patron saint. If we are named Thaddeus or we are named John or whatever Christian name it is that we have, we have to have a relationship with that patron saint. If we are not praying to them regularly, if we are not reading their life, if we are not reading, in my case, even scripture that was provided by this saint, my patron saint, then I'm a fool. I'm not cultivating the most fundamental relationship with a saint that God has given me in his providence.

The second type of saints that we go after are the big saints of the church, the ones that everybody knows about because their stories are so glorious or their theology is so rich and so fundamental to the understanding of the faith in our church. We have to know them, we have to know St. Basil the Great, we have to know St. John Chrysostom, we have to know Gregory Palamas. They are of the church, they are the church. Therefore we have to be familiar with them.

And then the third type that we are given, at times, in God's providence alone, are our local saints. Saints that lived where we live or saints whose relics we have. I'm amazed always, and I inferred this a little bit on Sunday, that I'm amazed always that St. John ended his life in San Francisco. He could have gone to any monastery on the face of the Earth that he wanted to. He could've been the abbot of the most glorious Russian monasteries anywhere. He could've gone to Mount Athos or somewhere else, but stayed with his flock where God took him and he ended his life, this incredible wonder worker, in San Francisco.

On one level it's sort of absurd. The city doesn't deserve him. And yet, in the providence of God, God chose that place to be blessed by him. St. John went and served services on the sidewalk outside of the Roman Catholic mission where St. Peter the Aleut was martyred. That's something we should do sometime. It's just a sidewalk in the middle of the city and he would go there and he would setup a table and he would serve services, because that is where his local saint died.

And so with St. John particularly we have to be devoted to him, we have to know him. Not because you're cool if you do, but because God has given him to us, He's put him in our backyard. St. John came all the way down, we have pictures of him in Monterey and other places. He is our local saint and so we must know him because he's our neighbor. He's our spiritual and mystical neighbor, that's all. So it's very important that we know St. John.

So we look at local saints that God has given us providentially. We look at the great saints of the church that define it for us, create our understanding of what the church is and then we devote ourselves also to our patron saint, that we would know them and that in God's providence we would emulate them, that we do our best to try and be like them because God gave them to us to follow as they followed Jesus Christ himself.

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So on this day, let us remember St. John, with great love. Let us remember our patron saints and re-devote ourselves to him. The Christian life is one of continual renewal of the mind, anamnesis, the remembrance of everything that we know and that we have done and that has been done for us and that Christ offers to us continually. So everyday when we have the opportunity, renew our understanding of what it means to be a Christian. And today, we renew our understanding of what it means to love God, to love our local saints, to love the great saints of the church and to love our patron saint. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, amen.