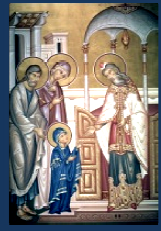


June 26, 2011

Sunday Sermon

Fr Ambrose Young
Entrance of the Theotokos Skete



Sunday of All the Saints of America, June 26, 2011

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

Two weeks ago we celebrated the great and important Feast of Pentecost, which reminds us of the descent of the Third Person of the Holy Trinity, the Holy Spirit, on the first Church, in the Upper Room in Jerusalem, 50 days after the Resurrection of Christ.

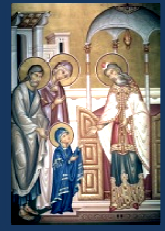
Then last Sunday was the Sunday of All Saints, on which we remembered that the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Church has brought forth an endless harvest of saints--saints of all kinds, types, walks of life, and callings, a harvest that began in the time of the Apostles and continues to our very own day.

Accordingly, today is the Sunday of the local saints in each land. In Russia this would be the Sunday of All the Saints of Russia. In Greece, it's the Sunday of All the Saints of Greece, and so forth. But because we live in America, for us it is the Sunday of All the Saints of America. However, while the Orthodox countries have produced hundreds of thousands of saints, if not millions, we here in America have produced so far only the smallest handful--no more than a dozen in our two-hundred years of Orthodox presence. We should receive this fact with shame and with sadness, because it speaks of the spiritual poverty of Orthodox Christianity in this country today.

However, all is not lost, because the few saints that God has raised up for us already have much to teach us, if we will only pay attention. And if we truly and sincerely and fully pay attention, these saints will lift *us* up to heaven, too.

The first saints that flower in a new Orthodox country or culture are intended by the Lord to help us see the path that our Orthodoxy is to take. So, for example, in Russia, the first saints were what are called "Passion Bearers"--because they willingly suffered martyrdom in order to spare others from suffering or death. In other words, like Christ Himself, they laid down their lives for others. This kind of selfless self-emptying of one's own ego and even of one's own life, became a theme that guided spirituality in Russia for a thousand years. Not coincidentally, the last saints to be produced in Russia before the Communist Revolution were also innocent Passion-Bearers--the martyred royal family of Russia, who accepted martyrdom with serenity, believing that they were dying for the sins of Russia.

So, what about here, in North America? Well, our very first saint was St. Herman of Alaska, a very humble monk--not even a priest--who came from Russia with the first Russians to the territory of Alaska (which belonged to the Russian Empire at that time). St. Herman cared for



orphans and courageously defended the weak and poor Native Americans against exploitation by Russian merchants and others. By bringing St. Herman to this continent and raising him up for our instruction and imitation, God wanted to show us that our spiritual labors here in America must also be quiet, humble, but courageous, not trying to be big shots or important, with an emphasis not so much on the outward structure of the Church, but on our own inner spiritual life and the ways in which we can gently share this with others.

We have not yet lived up to this model, although some of the other saints of America, like St. John Maximovitch, the Wonderworker, of San Francisco, who died only in 1966, have done so. And figures like St. Raphael of Brooklyn and St. Alexis Toth of Pennsylvania have demonstrated that an Orthodox Christian can be humble and yet still manage to do great missionary work here. But their example is still largely ignored by most Orthodox Christians in America today, too, who do not see themselves as particularly missionary oriented, much less striving to learn humility.

So far we have produced only three martyrs for the faith in America, one of them a simple Alaska Native Indian, martyred by Catholic missionary friars when he would not renounce his Orthodox faith for Catholicism. Historically, martyrs have always been the seedbed of Orthodox Christianity in a new land, and from the first century to our own, there have been literally millions of them in all Orthodox countries except ours, which, feeble as we are, has produced so far only these three.



But let us return to St. Herman, and sit at his feet for a moment and learn from him, since he has much to teach us. St. Herman was not a theologian or a great writer or Father of the Church, nor, as I said was he even ordained a priest. He was just a simple monk. By that I mean that he was truly humble, thought little of himself, made no great "noise" in the Church or in the world (other than to meekly but effectively speak out against injustice) but was filled with the Holy Spirit and achieved perfection in the

virtues and union with Christ during his quiet life of humble work and witness to others.

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He did, however, leave us a very few writings and teachings, and here is one that I want to share with you this morning on the spiritual life.

St. Herman wrote:

“A true Christian is made by faith and love toward Christ. Our sins do not in the least hinder our Christianity, according to the word of the Savior Himself. He deigned to say: not the righteous have I come to call, but sinners to salvation; there is more joy in heaven over one who repents than over ninety righteous ones. Likewise concerning the sinful woman who touched His feet, He deigned to say to the Pharisee Simon: to one who has love, a great debt is forgiven, but from one who has no love, even a small debt will be demanded. From these judgments a Christian should bring himself to hope and joy, and not in the least accept an inflicted despair. Here one needs the shield of faith.”

St. Herman concluded:

“Sin, to one who loves God, is nothing other than an arrow from the enemy in battle. The true Christian is a warrior fighting his way through the regiments of the unseen enemy to his heavenly homeland.”

How important this message is: our true homeland is heaven! And if we keep our eyes fixed on that, no matter what else is going on in our day-to-day lives, then we will already have begun to follow in the steps of St. Herman, the patron saint of North America. We will have begun to apply the lesson of St. Herman’s life, which the Lord has particularly chosen for Orthodox in this country to model themselves after.

So much did God love St. Herman that very often when visitors would come to see him in his small and lonely chapel on an island off the coast of Alaska, they would hear the singing of a mighty choir in the chapel, but when they opened the door, only little St. Herman was there, all alone. You see, when *he* prayed, angels from heaven descended and prayed with him!

Finally, on this Sunday of All Saints of America, I leave us all with these famous words of St. Herman: “From this day, and from this hour, let us love God above all.”

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