



## Parish Information Bulletin

### Program for 19 - 25 June 2022

<b>SUNDAY 19 JUNE</b>	<b>1st SUNDAY OF MATTHEW—ALL SAINTS</b> <b>Matthew 10: 32-33, 37-38, 19: 27-30</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>7.30am</b> Orthros and Divine Liturgy</li></ul>
<b>MONDAY 20 JUNE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>10.00am</b> Meeting of Elderly Citizens in Church Hall</li></ul>
<b>2022 SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASSES FOR ALL AGES</b> (A free voluntary program organised by the Church) <b>Lessons take place in the building behind the church and begin at 10.30am until Church dismissal.</b> We have classes for ages ranging from 5yrs to teenage years. Lessons are taught in a relaxed, friendly environment. Please bring your children along to learn of their rich Orthodox faith and come close to God and His Love.	
<b>THURSDAY 23 JUNE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>8.00—9.00pm</b> ➡ <b>TEENAGE YOUTH GROUP</b> <b>ALL TEENAGERS WELCOME</b> Join the group and learn about your faith, make friends, enjoy refreshments, in a friendly, relaxing environment. - In Church Hall, upstairs behind the Church</li></ul>
<b>FRIDAY 24 JUNE</b> <i>Nativity of St John the Baptist</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>7.30am</b> Orthros and Divine Liturgy</li></ul>
<b>SUNDAY 26 JUNE</b>	<b>GOSPEL READING: Matthew 4: 18-23</b> <b>EPISTLE READING: Romans 2: 10-16</b>

### Telephone Contact Numbers

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Fr Athanasios and  
Fr Ephraim are available  
at the Church every  
Monday to Friday  
between 4.00 and 6.00pm  
for Holy Confession and  
any spiritual need.

What does the daily invocation of the saints signify—of different ones each day, during the whole year, and during our whole life? It signifies that God's saints, as our brethren—but perfect—live, and are near us, ever ready to help us, by the grace of God. We live together with them in the house of our Heavenly Father, only in different parts of it. We live in the earthly, they in the heavenly half, but we can converse with them, and they with us.

God's saints are near to the believing heart, and are ready in a moment to help those who call upon them with faith and love.

Father John of Kronstadt, *My Life in Christ*

### 1st SUNDAY OF MATTHEW—ALL SAINTS, Matthew 10:32-33, 37-38; 19:27-30

#### Learning from Martyrs and Confessors: Homily for the Sunday of All Saints in the Orthodox Church

It is tempting to think that what we read about in the Scriptures and the history of the Church occurred in a world so different from ours that it has become irrelevant. This Sunday of All Saints reminds us that our Lord's fundamental calling to every generation does not change, but challenges the assumptions of every culture and the preferences of every human being. That calling is to participate personally in the holiness of God and to seek first His Kingdom, regardless of the cost.

When we hear today of our brothers and sisters in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia who are killed, abused, or become refugees due to their faithfulness to Jesus Christ, His words from today's gospel reading should come to mind: "Everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My Name's sake, will receive a hundred fold, and inherit eternal life. But many that are first will be last, and the last first." When we hear of terrorist attacks upon churches, the kidnapping of bishops and priests, and other atrocities, we should recall the graphic descriptions in Hebrews of the suffering of the Old Testament saints who hoped for the Messiah: "Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and scourging, even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were killed with the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, ..../

ill-treated—of whom the world was not worthy—wandering over deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.”

The first saints recognized by the Church were martyrs and confessors, people who accepted death or severe physical suffering instead of denying their Saviour. As St. Polycarp said when urged to save his life by denying Christ, “For eighty and six years have I been his servant, and he has done me no wrong, and how can I blaspheme my King who saved me?” Whether at the hands of the pagan Romans, Persian and Islamic empires, Communists, Fascists, ISIS or other terrorist groups, countless Christians have made—and continue to make—the ultimate witness for the Lord. According to His promise, He will acknowledge them before the Father because they acknowledged Him in the most profound way possible.

For Orthodox Christians, the saints are not dead figures from the past, but alive in Christ. There is one Church in heaven and on earth, and we are members of the Body of Christ together with them. They are the white-robed martyrs around the throne of God who worship Him eternally. We pray and worship God together with them, asking for their intercessions and seeking to follow their example of holiness. As our epistle reading states, “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfection of our faith.” As shining examples of what it means to love and serve Christ, the saints inspire us to ever greater faithfulness to Him. They are living proof that He has conquered death and that, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we may participate personally in His holy and eternal life. They point us to Him.

On this Sunday of All Saints, we commemorate all those who have entered in holiness into this great cloud of witnesses, especially those whose names we do not know. The Holy Spirit has revealed the names of many saints to the Church for our edification, but that is hardly an exhaustive list. And since humility is a necessary quality of holiness, that should not be surprising. When we remember the harsh realities of martyrdom and persecution through which they bore witness, it becomes immediately clear that the saintly path is not one of self-exaltation or pride. No, it is how those who are last—those who give up even life, family, and the most basic necessities—become first in a Kingdom not of this world.

Regardless of the country or time period in which we live, Christ calls us—no less than the martyrs and confessors—to acknowledge Him before others, to love Him even more than our families, and to take up our crosses. Today He calls us to be faithful witnesses to Him in a culture that has little place for principled self-restraint of any kind. We live in a time when many worship at the altars of immediate gratification and self-indulgence in every area of life. The selfishness, anger, hatred, and violence that we see so often in our culture reflect a failure to control our passions, which is a symptom of our collective disdain for putting anything or anyone before doing or saying whatever we feel like at the moment. Holiness in the relationship between man and woman, as well as faithful self-sacrifice in rearing children, are strange goals in our age of promiscuity and pornography, when many see no higher standard in life than fulfilling whatever desires they happen to have at the moment. Gluttony, greed, and trying obsessively to get what we want when we want it make many so spiritually and morally weak that they probably cannot even imagine living otherwise. And the fact that we celebrate these ways of thinking and living in the name of freedom or being true to ourselves makes them all the more dangerous.

To be true to ourselves as human beings means to become holy, to direct all our desires to their ultimate fulfilment in the Lord, and to be healed from our self-imposed slavery to self-centred desire. The saints are icons of what it means to be true to ourselves as those created in God’s image and likeness. The martyrs and confessors are shining examples of how to love and serve Christ above all else, and to order all our other attachments in light of our most fundamental commitment to Him. Their example calls us to acknowledge Him each day by living in this way. We acknowledge Him by taking up our crosses as we resist the pervasive temptations in our culture to worship ourselves, our possessions, our pleasures, and our loved ones. It may seem strange for Christ to warn against loving family members more than Him, but think for a moment how destructive it is for anyone to become a false god to another person. That kind of idolatry leads only to abuse, disappointment, and despair; we diminish ourselves and others when we do that. We distort marriage, family, and sex when we make them ends in themselves. It is far better to serve Christ in our family members through prayer, encouragement, and self-denial. That is how we and our loved ones will find fulfilment, blessing, and joy together as God’s children.

Our path to holiness will likely be through our daily struggle to be faithful in small ways that few will notice or celebrate. The question is not whether to serve God through grand gestures or extraordinary circumstances, but whether there is something of the martyr and the confessor in each of us. That means dying to our self-centeredness out of love for Christ. That means loving people in Christ, ordering our relationships such that they fulfil His purposes for us and them, even when that requires suffering. And it means turning the other cheek and loving our enemies, even when we risk being rejected, criticized, or ignored for being out of step with the ways of the world.

No, that is not easy. But when we remember the martyrs and confessors and all that they endured—and still endure—for faithfulness to Christ, we should have confident hope that the same Lord Who strengthened them even to the shedding of blood will surely not abandon us in our smaller struggles each day. And unless we are faithful in small challenges, we will never be prepared for the large ones. “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfection of our faith.” It is through His love, mercy, and grace that we too may share in the holiness that shines so brightly in all the saints.