

THESE SAINTS ARE OUR SAINTS

Meditations by Subdeacon Dr. Joshua D. Genig

On St. Matthew 4:25-5:12

(Gospel for the 2nd Sunday After Pentecost, All Saints of North America, 3 July 2016)

St. Innocent Orthodox Church, Redford, MI



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

Our troubles, our difficulties, our fears, our sins, and our shames always hit close to home. It's funny how our first thought is always about ourselves. No one has it as difficult as we do. No one has suffered as we have suffered. No one can relate to my pain and my fear and my shame. Or so we think.

But while these troubles of ours are always so near to us, while we are always thinking about how difficult *we've got it*, the lives of the saints—the example of those who have finished their course in faith, those who, as we say at the Mystery of Baptism, have “receive[d] the prize of [their] high calling, and [are] numbered with the firstborn whose names are written in heaven”—their lives, their victories, their hope, and their example always seem so far away.

Yes, we see them in this temple, but do we really know them?

Yes, we venerate their icons, but do we really embrace them with a holy kiss?

Yes, we hear their names—some of which we can't even pronounce!—but do we recognize them as our family?

One of the great struggles of the Christian life, of this pilgrimage back toward the Kingdom, is that while our troubles are so near to us — *while it's really all we ever think about* — our hope, our example, our comfort, our support, *our Saints*, always seem so distant from us.

And this gap comes because we don't often think of the saints as being alive. When people are lowered into the earth, we have been trained to think that they are gone, that they are dead, that they are no more.

But there is a simpler reason for this gap, I think—this gap between the Saints and us. So often, we hear the names and places of these Saints, and they are foreign to us. They lived in, and traveled throughout, and ministered to, and are now buried in places that many of us have never been to before. And so even if we think of them as our intercessors, they are doing so, we often think, at a distance.

And that, dear brothers and sisters, is why this particular Sunday is so important for us. Last week, the Sunday of all Saints, but this week, the Sunday of All Saints of North America—those who from this land, who served this land, or who on this land, died as we all hope to die: in friendship with Christ.

They struggled as we struggle.

They often feared what we fear.

And, yes, don't be fooled – they even sinned as we sin (and sometimes worse!).

But they discovered the one thing that actually matters in this life: that, as St. Augustine says, “our hearts are restless until they rest in [God].”

And that is what it means to be saved. To have your heart in God. To have your heart in God's heart. To love what He loves. To desire what He desires. To live as He lives. And, as we just heard in the Holy Gospel, to follow where He bids us go.

The world is changing, and so is North America. I imagine that, 100 years from now, folks will be celebrating this Sunday (and, God willing, in this very temple), and many of the names we now know may be on that list, maybe even some of yours.

May God, in His mercy and loving-kindness, help us to see these Saints as *our saints*, and may He count us worthy to join their ranks, for He alone is good and loves mankind.

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