

**3rd Sun > Pentecost, June 21, 15, Gosp. Matt. 6:22-33, Ep. Rom. 5:1-10, Fr. Andrew
Celtic and Other Saints**

Glory to Jesus Christ! Today is the third Sunday after Pentecost and once again we are to consider the saints of the Orthodox Church. We have gone from considering all of the tens of thousands of canonized and glorified saints throughout the entire world and all of Church history, to last week considering the handful of our recognized saints here in North America, and now today we look at the thousands of first millennium British and Irish Saints, mostly the Celtic saints; one of the best known of course being our own St. Aidan of Lindisfarne. This 3rd. saint's day was instituted by the Russian Orthodox Church very recently, in 2007.

It really is an inexhaustible list, Sts. Athanasius, Chrysostom, Basil, Nicolas, about 5 Gregory's another 10 Mary's, Seraphim, Prophyrios, Nektarios, more John's than you can count and tens of thousands of others, then to our North American guys, Sts. Herman, Peter, Tikhon, Innocent, John, Nicolai etc. and today if we were to start listing our Celtic bunch there would be Sts. Aristobulos, Patrick, Brendan, David, Kevin, Columba, Columbanus, Colman, Cuthbert, Bridget, Hilda, Ida, Dymphna, Martyr Kings Edwin, Oswald, Oswin, the 1000 martyrs from Linchfield who suffered under Diocletian, and thousands more.

It is very significant that for the first three Sundays after Pentecost we are to reflect upon the saints who have gone before us and manifested the gift of the Holy Spirit, radiating still with the light of Christ, to bring the kingdom of heaven to those they touch. This is the fruit of Pentecost, and this is why we are to study the lives and writings of the saints. That we may see that this is the path that we also are called to, and we may see with clarity what it looks like in the thousands of lives that have travelled it within our Church. There are as many different paths to sainthood as there are saints and they are all marvellous and treasured in the eyes of God and His Church.

One of the most astounding things that we come to see as we take the time to read and study the teachings of the saints is the absolute consistency of doctrine and belief that runs through their teachings. These thousands of our recognized and glorified saints are all part of the "visible" Church of Christ, the Orthodox Church, not of some amorphous spiritual union of well meaning Christians with a thousand different understandings regarding what is a proper interpretation of scripture. Throughout every century when you read the works of the saints of the Church, the interpretation stays the same. We can read Sts. Athanasius or Chrysostom in the early fourth century, the venerable Bede or the Gregory's of Rome in the eighth century, Sts. Symeon or Sava in the 12th century, Sts. Macarius or Mark of Ephesus in the 16th century, or in this century, St. Cleopa of Romania, St. Nicolai of Zicha or St. Prophyrios, glorified last year- the message never changes. There is no "new move of God," (Heb. 13:8) "*He is the same yesterday today, and forever.*" I hear people say that "this is what God is doing today" and I confess I am puzzled. Has God come up with some new and more effective idea? No, it is not some new move of God we seek, but our hearts which need to be moved and converted and come to rest in Christ, as have all the saints through all the ages before. The most reliable and time proven way for this to occur is within the protection and nourishment of the Church, through her sacramental life.

We should not expect that somehow we will receive great revelations apart from what has always been taught by the Church. Actually Christ tells us in the last days just the opposite will occur. (Matt.24:4,5) *“Take heed that no one deceive you. For many shall come in My name, saying I am the Christ and many will be deceived.”* The main safeguard that can protect us from being deceived is learning what the saints of every age have taught us, what the Church teaches us and thereby having a standard to judge by. Yes, we all say we follow what the bible teaches, but the important question is whose interpretation of the bible do we follow? Do we really think we have the wisdom to decide? We need to cultivate a spirit of humility and realize just how susceptible we are to error when we judge by our own reasoning and understanding. Not a popular message I realize in our modern culture where a 3 year old’s “Happy meal” at MacDonal’d’s comes with the banner that to achieve “girl power” you must “rewrite all the rules.”

One of our great 7th century Celtic saints, Bishop Cuthbert taught his flock with great love and gentleness. His advice was “You need to learn and put into practise the teachings of the Fathers and avoid heretics.” He comes with good credentials. When just a 17 year old lad while he was out tending his flock of sheep, he had a vision of the angels bearing the soul of St. Aidan to heaven in a fiery trail of light. Several days later news of St. Aidan’s repose on Aug. 31, 651 reached his area and St. Cuthbert learned it was at the very hour of his vision. St. Cuthbert’s relics were found to be incorrupt and streaming myrrh when they were moved to Durham and opened more than 300 years later. You can trust that these Celtic saints we celebrate today were real and serious about following Christ. You can trust that all of the saints that have been glorified and given to us for emulation by the Church are well worth not just leaning from, but as there are no dead in Christ, they can be of great help interceding for us before the very throne of God, once we take the time to get to know them and ask for their help.

Today’s Gospel starts out saying *“The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness.”* What does this mean? The only light possible is from Christ, so we need the mind of Christ to replace all of our bitter judgements, and foolish conclusions about how life works if we are to be full of light.

All through the scriptures Christ is talking about spiritual blindness as He heals physical blindness – always drawing parallels between the two. As He starts His ministry he announces that one of His chief purposes is to bring *“recovery of sight to the blind”*. We have the Sunday of the blind man, with Christ healing the one born without eyes and then the Sunday where we read of Christ healing blind Bartimaeus. Christ describes the Pharisees as *“Blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel,”* and when they ask Him if they too are blind, Christ replies *“If you were blind you would have no sin; but now you say ‘We see.’ Therefore your sin remains.”* So, we see that the subject of the state of our blindness, especially our blindness to our blindness is of great importance.

One of the chief characteristics of spiritual blindness is that we have no idea that we are suffering from it. The Pharisees are continually held out to us as examples of those who are most deluded and at the same time most confident that they are right. You can be right OR you can be happy and joyful but you can’t be both; they are mutually exclusive. The Pharisees are completely resistant to having anyone intrude upon their world view;

even God Himself standing in front of them in the flesh. Unfortunately, they aren't really all that unique, and our sinful human nature has not really improved, no matter what our new age friends in the wonderful human potential movement try to tell us. John Michael Talbot has a very moving song about Christ's crucifixion called "Would You Crucify Him?" The last line concludes: "Yes, I think we would crucify Him, my religious friends, If He walked right here among us once again." Very sad but very true. This is why the Church gives us the Jesus prayer to continuously pray as an antidote to our great spiritual blindness. "*Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God have mercy on me a sinner.*" It expresses our true reality. As this prayer seeps into our hearts, the scales covering our eyes will slowly dissolve and the light of Christ begins to fill our vision.

It can be very unsettling and painful when we first begin to suspect that our paradigm, our view of the world is very flawed and extremely limited and limiting. Paradoxically this starts us on the road to having our eyesight corrected. We usually do not want to willingly give up our very comfortable and self-affirming world view. We tend to surround ourselves with those who think as we do, so we can continually reassure each other that we are all viewing life and reality properly, allowing the narrow limitations of the cultural environment that we grow up in to shape our entire view of reality. True reality is that we here in North America live in a very unique time and place, and our world view is radically different from much of the world around us, and especially from any generation going back before the beginning of the last century, and not necessarily better. Travelling to a completely different culture, visiting a third world country, an ancient civilization with roots that go back thousands of years, or even studying history can radically change our perspectives and shake us out of our rather insulated comfort zone. This is a very valuable spiritual exercise, as in our great comfort we tend to develop a certain arrogance and self reliance, a sinful perspective that we are somehow a little superior to most others. This in reality is the sin of pride, a great delusion which the human race is very prone to. Anything that helps to open our eyes to our utter dependence upon God and each other, and produces a spirit of humility is of great value. We have all from our very earliest years made many mistaken and harmful conclusions regarding how life works, and all of these need to be brought to death at the cross and drowned in the cleansing water of our baptismal tank. This is what Christ, through the Orthodox Church offers to us and has faithfully delivered to every generation of His saints since He established His Church.

So let us learn to be less trustful of our own perspective, let us ask God in His mercy to continue to break down our barriers and defences in His gracious timing, that the light of Christ may illumine those areas of our lives that we can't quite yet bear to see. Let us realize that we are suffering from great delusion, and that our friends and families and our entire culture usually only serve to reinforce that delusion, as we are all suffering in it together. He is gentle and loving and will not give us more self knowledge than we can handle, but we need to be willing to let go of many of our judgements and viewpoints to make room for the light of God's true reality. We need to recognize our blindness, repent and ask Christ for His healing and restoration, and walk in this new resurrected life.

May Christ, through the prayers and examples of all the saints, the power and wisdom of His Church and the communion of the Holy Spirit, lead and guide us into His kingdom!
Glory to Jesus Christ!