

Sermon on Founders Day of St. Tikhon's Monastery

Glory Be to Jesus Christ!

Glory Forever!

We greet you on this, the celebration of the life of St. Tikhon's Monastery. It is a place that has carved out a special corner in the hearts of all Orthodox Christians, not only in America, but in all the World.

We celebrate not only with the Bishops, Priests, and Pilgrims who have joined us this morning, but with All of the Saints: St. Tikhon of Moscow, St. Nikolai of Zhicha, St. John of San Francisco, St. Alexis of Wilkes-Barre, and the many others who have walked here before us. They stand here invisibly present with us, praying and glorifying God before His Holy Altar.

It is that same Altar that was consecrated by St. Tikhon of Moscow, who from his Troparion we read was "Chosen by God in a turbulent time, to lay down his life for the Church and its people."

In a sermon for Orthodoxy Sunday, St. Tikhon described the harsh realities of our earthly life, likening it to "a ship, sailing amidst a ferocious and stormy sea, which is ready to drown it in its waves. The further the ship sails, the harder the waves of life slam against it and the fiercer they attack it! But the harder the waves hit the ship, the further they are thrown away to rejoin the abyss...and disappear."

This ship can be used to describe St. Tikhon's Monastery itself; the stable ship that continues to sail through the noise of our personal lives, protecting us from getting caught up and drowning in the noise and evil of this world. Despite the power of these waves, our Monastery ship harbors us and continues to drive forward towards the Heavenly Kingdom which is to come.

Like St. Tikhon at the founding of this Holy Monastery, we too live in turbulent times. But this place, this sacred place where Saints have walked, has been an image of stability and a rock of faith, just as its founders were.

The Location for St. Tikhon's Monastery, nestled between the Appalachian Mountains, was not chosen by accident. It was chosen for the specific reason of being isolated from the noise of this world.

In the journals of St. Tikhon and Fr. Arseny, they describe their search for the perfect place to plant the vision of monasticism in America:

“We found ourselves in the lap of breathtaking nature amidst the mountains and forests of Pennsylvania. The sound of human voices could no longer be heard, while at the same time the feathery choristers began singing their marvelous praise to the creator...giving rise to the heartfelt feelings of sweetness in our hearts.”

“By the roadside lies an old oak tree, decaying...a century-old witness of these virgin lands. There, one might see a giant boulder that a wandering wild beast must have used to rest upon the deep cold of winter. Now in the summertime, a wild hen makes her stand while looking around on a mourning heavy with dew.

“Amidst this wonderful nature, even a long road seemed to be short.”

It was here, on the ground we stand on this morning, where these two men, with their zeal and farsighted vision, cooperating with divine grace at every step, were able to turn dream into reality for the Orthodox Faithful in this country.

How fitting, that the Patron and founder of this Holy Place both share a common name...Tikhon...which comes from the Russian word for “Quiet”. It is this quiet and isolated monastic experience that has given us all stability.

The silence and peace of these Holy Grounds has formed and influenced so many in our mission to expand the Church in these lands, because it is only when hearts are quieted, that we are truly able to hear our missionary calling.

St. Tikhon said that calling ought to be near and precious to the hearts of All Orthodox Christians. He said that it is our job to faithfully spread the true faith among the non-Orthodox.

It was St. Tikhon who reminded us that it was Christ Himself who said that: “having lit the candle, men do not put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick so that it gives light, not only to shine for a small circle of people, but to all the world.

Sometimes, in our mission to spread the Gospel, the light fades. We fall and are slammed down by the crashing waves of evil and temptation. It is this place...these Holy Grounds...where we come to take refuge and rekindle the light which had faded.

Without the Founders, we would have nothing. Today we honor those who built the ship. We honor figures like Archbishop Arseny and Patriarch Tikhon who established this place. We Honor the captains of the Ship: all of the Bishops, Abbots, Priests, Monastics, benefactors, and faithful that have graced the four walls of the Monastery. It is the prayers and efforts of these people that have allowed the flame of Orthodoxy to burn as bright as it has in this country.

Let us Take this light, let it first burn inside of you, then use it to spread the true faith to all corners of this country.

Through the prayers of St. Tikhon and all the Saints who have walked here before us...intercede before God that He may save our souls.

Homily by Deacon Gabriel Bilas, October 2014