

THE MONASTERY OF SAINT TIKHON OF ZADONSK

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Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

The Feast of All Saints is especially beloved in monasteries because in our services throughout the whole year, day in and day out, monastics honor the hundreds of saints whose names are mentioned in the liturgical calendar, and through the Church's hymns they also honor the hundreds of thousands of other saints whose names are known only to God.

St. John the Theologian writes in figures and images of the New Jerusalem, that heavenly City full of the glorious saints of God. Noting that the City's twelve gates are always open (*cf.* Rev. 21:25), Elder Aimilianos of Simonopetra highlights "the essential unity of the heavenly and earthly paradise, and the unbroken communion of the Church and the heavenly Jerusalem." He adds that "the ranks of the saints are in constant communion with us, and we communicate with them through our prayers, through the sacraments, and so on. The traffic is continuous, and it is served by twelve roads and twelve gates." (*The Way of the Spirit*, p. 346)

It's very important for us to cultivate this awareness of the presence and the work of the saints in our lives. When we pay attention only to what's going on visibly on earth, we can begin to feel that there are very few people left that are seriously striving to please God in their lives. This can drag us into futile anger and morose despair. But by shifting our gaze to heaven, we come to realize how vast are the ranks of those who love nothing but to do God's will in all things: both the angels and the saints. Indeed, we come to realize that obedience to God is the *normal* state of existence! It is disobedience and sin that are *abnormal*.

This realization can be a great encouragement for us! Whenever we pray the Lord's Prayer, we ask that God's will be done "on earth as it is in heaven," but how often do we stop to think of those innumerable choirs of spirits—both angelic and human—all rushing with joy and peace to accomplish God's will? And "the traffic" between heaven and earth "is continuous". The twelve gates are opened, and angels and saints move between heaven and earth, ascending and descending on the Son of Man—our Savior Christ Himself, who by His blood has opened the way for us to enter into the Holy Place (*cf.* Jn. 1:51; Heb. 10:19).

None of this is at all to deny or trivialize the full reality and darkness of evil and sin. But in the balance, one drop of heaven's joy weighs infinitely more than all the lawlessness and ugliness of hell, and the saints are here among us to help open our spiritual eyes to this truth.

With God's help, we at St. Tikhon's Monastery also try in our small ways to help open people's spiritual eyes to the light of paradise. Your generous support touches the lives of so many people beyond our own community. On behalf of the entire monastic Brotherhood, I would like to express how grateful we are for all your support and prayers. May God bless and richly reward you and be assured of our prayers for you!

Yours in Christ,



Archimandrite Sergius
Abbot of St. Tikhon's Monastery