

CONCERNING ICONS

—by Saint John of Kronstadt—

If anyone asks you why you pray to soulless icons, what profit do you derive from them, say that we derive incomparably greater profit from our icons than we do from the kindest and most benevolent living persons. Say that blessed power and help to our souls always comes to us from icons, saving us from sins, sorrows, and sicknesses; especially from icons of the Savior and the Mother of God.

The images of the Saints that are depicted in our sacred icons indicate that the Saints of God are near us in the Holy Spirit, when we pray to them with fervent faith. The Holy Spirit is indeed **“unhindered, beneficent, man-loving, steadfast, unailing, free from worry, all-powerful, all-surveying, and penetrating all spirits that are rational, pure, and most subtle” (WSol. 7:23).** **“There is joy before the angels of God when one sinner repents” (Lk. 15:10).** This means that the inclination of our soul is open not only before God but also before the Angels.

It is necessary to have icons in our churches and in our homes because, amongst other things, they remind us of the immortality of the Saints. **“For they all live in Him” (Lk. 20:38)**, as Christ stated. Living in God, they see us, they hear us, and they help us.

Icons are demanded by our very nature. We naturally cannot do without icons. We bring to mind a person who is not present by looking at an image of him. God Himself gave us the ability to envision. Icons, therefore, are the Church’s response to a particular essential need of our human nature.

We have icons in our homes and we honor them. In this manner, we profess, in addition to many other things, that the eyes of God and all the residents of Paradise are constantly turned towards us, and that they see not only our actions but even our thoughts and desires.