

HE WHO HONORS THE LORD ALSO HONORS HIS SAINTS

—from the book *Nothing is Incurable for St. Nektarios*—

The Holy Scriptures instruct us to honor and respect the elderly: "Thou shalt rise up before the grey-headed, **and honor the presence of an old man**, and fear thy God: I am the Lord thy God" (**Lev. 19:32**). Are we then not obligated to respect and honor the Saints and friends of God? Yes, we are obligated to do so; for the Holy Scriptures direct us not only to honor and respect but also to reverence and fear them: "Ye shall keep My sabbaths, **and reverence My saints**" (**Lev. 19:30**).

God Himself attests that He bestows glory to them who glorify Him: "**I will glorify them who glorify Me**" (**1 Kg. 2:30**). Thus, we should rejoice when honoring the memory of the Saints whom God has glorified, just as the prophet and king David did: "**But to me, exceedingly honorable are Thy friends, O Lord**; their principalities are made exceedingly strong. I will count them, and they shall be multiplied more than the sand" (**Ps. 138:17**). And this is why elsewhere he orders emphatically, "**Praise ye God in His Saints**" (**Ps. 150:1**). The wise Solomon similarly admits: "**The memory of the righteous is accompanied with praise**, but the name of the ungodly shall be extinguished" (**Pr. 10:7**).

The New Testament continues to instruct and recommend that we honor the Saints. "Wherefore I also," says the Apostle Paul, "after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, **and love unto all the saints** cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers" (**Eph. 1:15-16**). And in his epistle to the Collosians he repeats, "We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, **and of the love which ye have to all the saints**" (**Col. 1:3-4**). The apostle repeats the same thing in his epistle to Philemon: "I thank my God, making mention of thee always in my prayers, **hearing of thy love and faith, which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all saints**" (**Phm. 1:4-6**).

Unquestionably, the word "saints" in the above verses refers to all the devout faithful who preserve a fervent love for Christ within their hearts. If, therefore, we are obligated to honor, respect, and love every fervent and devout Christian, how much more are we obligated to reverence the Saints whom God Himself has honored and glorified!

Our holy Orthodox Church honors and praises (in addition to the Virgin Mother of the Lord) all the Saints who pleased God, and whom Christ refers to as His friends and brothers (Jn. 15:5; Jn. 20:17; Mt. 28:10). Mutual love and respect exists amongst men, as dictated by both divine and human precepts. If we are obligated to honor and respect our fellow man, much greater honor and gratitude is owed to the persons who became faithful followers of the God-man Jesus Christ, who have been glorified—through His Grace—with various signs and miracles, and who have, thus, been honored by God Himself according to His promise, **"I will glorify them who glorify Me."**

The Orthodox Church is often defamed and ridiculed, either intentionally or unknowingly, by various Bible-based denominations for honoring these men and women who have become eternal examples of virtue for ensuing generations to follow, and who have been honored by God Himself. Having rejected the correct understanding held by the Orthodox Church and desiring to justify their erroneous positions, such groups slander and accuse Orthodox Christians of supposedly worshipping the Saints as equal to God, and, consequently, of plummeting into the evil of idolatry! No worse fallacy than this could exist.

The Orthodox Church holds no such beliefs. On the contrary, She succinctly explains through Her various writings the meaning and the spirit with which She honors the Saints.

Let us begin by bringing forth the testimony of Saint Epiphanius, Bishop of Cyprus. This holy father advises us to honor the Saints, whom he distinguishes from the Lord and Master. Behold his words: "He who honors the Lord also honors the Saints. Whereas, he who dishonors the Saints also dishonors their Master" (Heresy 78, chapter 21).

St. Basil the Great states that the honor given to the Saints refers to and ascends to the Lord, Whom they have pleased. He further says that he who honors the Saints reveals that he has a zeal for the faith equivalent to that of the Saints whom he honors.

St. Gregory the Theologian speaks similarly.

Therefore, the Orthodox Church honors the Saints not as God, but as fellow servants who have worked for the Lord and who put their life in danger to defend the divine truths and correct dogmas of the Christian Faith.