

WE MUST HONOR THE SAINTS

—by St. John of Damascus—

It is necessary to honor the saints as friends of Christ, and as children and heirs of God, as the Theologian and Evangelist states: **“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God” (Jn. 1:12)** **“Therefore they are no longer slaves but children; and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ” (Gal. 4:7 & Rom 8:17).** Our Lord also says to His Apostles in the sacred Gospel: **“You are My friends ... No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing” (Jn. 15:14-15).** If the Lord and Creator of all is called **“the King of kings and the Lord of lords” (1 Tim. 6:15),** and **“the God of gods” (Dt. 10:17),** then certainly the saints are gods, and lords, and kings. God is called and He truly is their God and Lord and King. **“I am,”** He says to Moses, **“the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” (Ex. 3:6).** Furthermore, God made Moses the god of Pharaoh **(Ex. 7:1).** I am calling them gods, and kings, and lords not because they are such by nature, but because they ruled over and conquered the passions, and because they preserved unchanged the likeness of the Divine image, according to which they were made—just as a picture of the king is also called the king. And because they willingly chose to be united with God and received Him within themselves, through communion with Him they became by grace all the things that He is by nature. How then can we not honor them who became the servants, and friends, and sons of God? When we honor grateful fellow-servants, this is proof that we have love for our common Master.

These people have become God’s chambers and pure abodes. **“I will dwell within them,”** says the Lord, **“and I will walk amongst them and I will be their God” (Lev. 26:11-12).** The holy Scriptures state that **“the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and sorrow will not touch them” (Wisdom 3:1).** For the death of the saints is sleep rather than death: **“they have labored for ever, and shall live to the end” (Ps. 48:10).** And **“Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints” (Ps. 115:6).** What is more honorable than being in the hands of God? God is Life and Light, and they who are in the hands of God exist within Life and Light.

God dwelled within their bodies through their *nous*, as the Apostle Paul confirms: **“Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit?” (1 Cor. 6:19).** **“Now the Lord is the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:17),** and **“if anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him” (1 Cor. 3:17).** How then can we not honor these living temples of God, the living dwellings of God? Living, they stand before God with boldness.

Our Master Christ has provided us with the relics of the saints as salvific springs, which gush forth an array of blessings, and streams of fragrant myrrh. No one should doubt this. If God, when He so desired, made water flow from a

jagged rock in the desert (**Ex 17:6**) and from the jaw of a donkey (for Sampson who was thirsty) (**Judges 15:19**), is it impossible for fragrant myrrh to flow forth from the relics of the martyrs? Not at all! Not for them who know the power of God and the honor that He gives to His saints.

According to the Law, anyone who touched a dead person became unclean (**Numbers 19:11**); however, the saints are not dead. Ever since the source and cause of Life was numbered among the dead, we no longer call “dead” them who have fallen asleep with faith in Him and with hope in the resurrection. How is it possible for a dead body to perform miracles? How is it possible for demons to be cast out, for the sick to be healed, for the blind to see, for lepers to be cleansed (**Mt. 11:15**), for temptations to be dispersed, and for every good gift from the Father of lights (**James 1:17**) to descend through the saints upon the people who ask with undoubting faith? Shouldn’t we honor the protectors of the entire human race who pray to God on our behalf? Yes! We certainly should honor them by building churches for God dedicated in their names, by offering fruits, by praising their memories and spiritually rejoicing during their feast days. Let us, O faithful, honor the saints by **“speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs”** (**Eph. 5:19**), with compunction and the oil of prayer, through which God is especially worshipped. Let us raise pillars and visible icons of them, and let us become living pillars and icons of them by mimicking their virtues.

Let us honor the Theotokos as literally and truly the mother of God. Let us honor the prophet John as the Forerunner, Baptist, apostle, and martyr, who became the first preacher of the Kingdom of Heaven; **“for there is no one amongst them born of women greater than John”** (**Mt. 11:11**), as the Lord attested. Let us honor the Apostles as brothers of the Lord, as witnesses and servants of His sufferings, whom God the Father **“foreknew, and predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son”** (**Rom. 8:29**); **“first apostles, second prophets, third shepherds and teachers”** (**1 Cor. 12:28**). Let us honor the martyrs of the Lord, who were selected from various ranks as soldiers of Christ, who drank from His cup, and who were baptized in the baptism of His life-giving death. Let us honor them as communicants of His sufferings and His glory, of whom first is the archdeacon of Christ, the apostle and first-martyr Stephan. Let us honor our righteous fathers and the God-bearing ascetics who contested in the lengthy and toilsome martyrdom of the conscience, who **“wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth—of whom the world was not worthy”** (**Hb. 11:37-38**). Let us honor the prophets, the patriarchs, and all the righteous people who lived prior to the period of grace, and who announced to us the advent of Lord. Let us carefully examine the conduct of each one of them and let us desire to imitate their faith (**Hb. 13:7**), their love, their hope, their zeal, their life, their perseverance in sufferings, and their patience unto death, so that we may also share with them in the crowns of glory.