

## Saints & Sanctity (Hagiology) Outline

### Intro : Christ's Invitation

- Christ invites us to His Kingdom through the Way of the Cross.
- "Orthodoxy is the Church of Christ on earth. The Church of Christ is not an institution; it is a new life with Christ and in Christ, guided by the Holy Spirit. Christ, the Son of God, came to earth, was made man, uniting His divine life with that of humanity. This divine-human life He gives to His brethren, who believe on His name. Although He died and rose again and ascended into heaven, He was not separated from His humanity, but remains in it. The light of the resurrection of Christ lights the Church, and the joy of resurrection, of the triumph over death, fills it. The risen Lord lives with us and our life in the Church is a mysterious life in Christ." (Fr Sergius Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church*, 1.)

### What is Sanctity?

- Sanctity (holiness) is a kind of alienation to the conventional patterns of the world. Striving for holiness can seem like both a blessing and a curse: the former, from a spiritual perspective, because it is an elevated mode of existence; and the latter, from a carnal perspective, because it requires you to die to the world.
- "‘The world’ is the general name for all the passions. When we wish to call the passions by a common name, we call them the world. But when we wish to distinguish them by their special names, we call them passions. The passions are the following: love of riches, desire for possessions, bodily pleasure from which comes sexual passion, love of honor which gives rise to envy, lust for power, arrogance and pride of position, the craving to adorn oneself with luxurious clothes and vain ornaments, the itch for human glory which is a source of rancor and resentment, and physical fear. Where these passions cease to be active, there the world is dead.... Someone has said of the Saints that while alive they were dead; for though living in the flesh, they did not live for the flesh. See for which of these passions you are alive. Then you will know how far you are alive to the world, and how far you are dead to it." (St Isaac the Syrian)
- And He opened His mouth and taught them, saying: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all

kinds of evil against you falsely on My account. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for your reward is great in heaven.” (Mt 5.2-12; cf. Lk 6.20-26)

What is a Saint?

- Saints are holy ones, made holy by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Holiness is cultivated through self-denial and the pursuit of the Christian virtues. All Christians are called to be saints, but some are recognized as particularly exceptional witnesses to the Gospel.
- “[The Holy Spirit] hides Himself, identifying Himself, so to speak, with the human persons upon whom He confers a second nature--deity, the deifying energies. He becomes the source of personal deification, of the uncreated treasure in each person. He brings to each person its ultimate perfection.... The hypostases of the one nature of the Church are human persons. That is why, in their commentaries on the Song of Songs, the Fathers see in the figure of the Bride not only the Church, but also every person entering into union with God.” (Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 192-193.)
- “Let not us, who would be Christians, expect anything else from it than to be crucified. For to be Christian is to be crucified, in this time and in any time since Christ came for the first time. His life is the example — and warning — to us all. We must be crucified personally, mystically; for through crucifixion is the only path to resurrection. If we would rise with Christ, we must first be humbled with Him — even to the ultimate humiliation, being devoured and spit forth by the uncomprehending world. And we must be crucified outwardly, in the eyes of the world; for Christ’s Kingdom is not of this world, and the world cannot bear it, even a single representative of it, even for a single moment. The world can only accept Antichrist, now or at any time. No wonder then, that it is hard to be a Christian — it is not hard, it is impossible. No one can knowingly accept a way of life which, the more truly it is lived, lead the more surely to one’s own destruction. And that is why we constantly rebel, try to make life easier, try to be half-Christian, try to make the best of both worlds. We must ultimately choose — our felicity lies in one world or the other, not in both. God gives us the strength to pursue the path to crucifixion; there is no other way to be Christian.” (Fr Seraphim Rose)

The Witness of Sanctity

- The paradigmatic form of sanctity is martyrdom. Through their suffering, they bear witness to our hidden life with Christ. All the other kinds of saints, like monastics and fathers, imitate the otherworldly mode of life of martyrs. The vision of God possessed by the saints gives them insight into doctrine, and therefore, they have an authority that works together with the objective hierarchical authority of bishops and councils.
- “Teachers they were who practised their teaching in blood,

And whose faith was known by their sufferings.  
On their bodies they wrote the story of the Son of God  
With the marks of combs and scourges which thickly covered them.  
They showed their love, not by words of the mouth alone,  
But by tortures and by the rending of their limbs asunder. “

(Mar Jacob, “Homily on Guria and Shamuna”)

- “The Church knows divers degrees of sanctity or spiritual aspects of salvation: prophets, martyrs, doctors, venerable monks, soldiers and kings. And certainly this list is not complete: each epoch (ours among them) reveals new aspects of holiness, in addition to those already existing. Besides, not all the Saints are known to the world; there are those whom Our Lord permits to remain unknown to us. There is a feast of All Saints where all the Saints are together are commemorated, both those who are glorified and those who are not.” (Fr Sergius Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church*, 120--121.)
- “We look for reliable witnesses who are to be found only in the Church whose age-old experience is immeasurably richer and more profound than our individual one. Such in the distant past were the apostles who bequeathed to us in the gospel and epistle the knowledge which they had received direct from God. They were followed by a succession of fathers (doctors and ascetics) who handed down the centuries, above all, the spirit of life itself, often endorsing their testimony in writing. We believe that at any given historical moment it is possible to find living witnesses; to the end of time mankind will never be bereft of genuine gnosis concerning God. Only after authoritative confirmation may we trust our personal experience, and even then not to excess. (St Sophrony of Essex, *His Life is Mine*, 27.)

#### The Cult of the Saints

- The saints, as the friends of God, have the ability to pray for us. We ask the saints for their intercessions, especially our patron saints and guardian angels. We celebrate feast days, go on pilgrimages to shrines, venerate icons, light candles and oil lamps, and burn incense to honor the saints as Christian exemplars and our intercessors before God. Instead of celebrating worldly heroes, Christians venerate spiritual heroes. The reality of the saints is a fulfillment of man’s original vocation to be the *image of God*, manifesting God’s presence in the world. We venerate the relics of the saints as reminders of the reality of the bodily Resurrection. These devotions serve to sanctify time and space. The veneration of honor that we offer the saints is distinct from the divine adoration we offer to God alone. The two most important saints are the Mother of God and John the Baptist.

- “The cult of the Saints occupies a considerable place in Orthodox piety. The Saints are our intercessors and our protectors in the heavens and, in consequence, living and active members of the Church.... Their blessed presence in the Church manifests itself in their pictures and their relics. They surround us with a cloud of prayer, a cloud of the glory of God. This cloud of witnesses does not separate us from Christ, but brings us nearer, unites us to Him.” (Fr Sergius Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church*, 119.)
- “[The] two words ‘image’ and ‘likeness’ used to describe Adam (in Latin *imago* and *similitudo*) are words that are regularly used for the anthropomorphic or zoomorphic objects of non-Israelite cultic devotion.... [The] Hebrew (and Aramaic) word *tselem* in the expression *tselem of a deity/God* normally means ‘divine cult statue’ (of a deity/God). In other words, Gen 1 itself says that at the climax of creation God created Adam to be his living cult statue or idol; not in the sense that he himself worshipped Adam, but *in the sense that the idol of a deity makes that deity manifest to the world*. The idol of the deities in the ancient world gave visible and physical form and presence to the god(dess) they represented.... One reason this reading of Gen 1 is likely to be faithful to the text’s original intention is the fact that it provides the strongest possible theological justification for the biblical prohibition against idolatry. The worship of idols made by human hands is a foolish travesty, not just because it dishonors God the Creator, but also because it disregards and dishonors humanity whom God has already placed in the world to be his one and only image-idol. The Decalogue and other biblical texts outlawing idolatry, it should be noted, do not deny the possibility that God himself could place in the world a true image [Greek: *eikon*] that would make him present within a particular space and time in ways analogous to non-Israelite beliefs about the role of an idol as the manifestation of a deity. Indeed, it now seems that in other parts of the Hebrew Bible, besides Gen 1, a polemic against idolatry is also grounded in the claim that only God’s humanity can truly function as God’s image.” (Crispin Fletcher-Louis, *Jesus Monotheism*, 282--284.)
- “[Far] from being a perpetuation of pagan religious practices under a Christian veneer, the cult of relics was a Christian innovation, viewed with horror by the pagans of late antiquity, who regarded its chief manifestation, a reverence for corpses, as a pollution.” (Bernard Hamilton, *Religion in the Medieval West*, 126.)
- “One consequence of the cult of the Saints is the veneration of their relics. Sometimes bodily incorruption is even revered as a sign of sanctity. Incorruption, however, is by no means a general rule, and it is not all essential for a saint to be canonized.... From a dogmatic point of view, veneration of relics (as well as that of the icons of Saints) is founded on faith in a special connection between the spirit of the Saint and his human remains, a connection death does not

destroy. In the case of the Saints the power of death is limited; their souls do not altogether leave their bodies, but remain present in spirit.... already glorified in earnest of the general resurrection.” (Fr Sergius Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church*, 123--124.)

- “Both of them, the Theotokos and the Forerunner, together present to the Word Incarnate the pinnacle and glory of creation, the closest to the angelic world.... The Virgin, it is true, is glorified by the Church as being ‘more honourable than the cherubim’ ... [The Forerunner] is also placed higher than the world of angels. Iconography sometimes expresses this by representing [him] with wings, like an angel... His superhuman, angelic ministry is combined with perfect human sanctity, and by this union he acquires primacy in the angelic world as well, where he is sometimes assigned the place occupied by the Morning Star before the Fall.... The Saints in their totality, headed by the Theotokos and the Forerunner, form the glory of God in human creation. Wisdom is justified in them.” (Fr Sergius Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church*, 125--126.)

## Appendix

- Stages of Sin
  - Suggestion
  - Coupling
  - Assent
  - Struggle
  - Passion
- Outline of repentance
  - Contrition of the heart
    - contrition motivated by love of God is superior to that motivated by fear
  - Confession of the mouth
  - Amendment of life
    - begins with a firm intention
- See [unseenwarfare.net](http://unseenwarfare.net)