

# HOLY TRINITY

## ROMANIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH



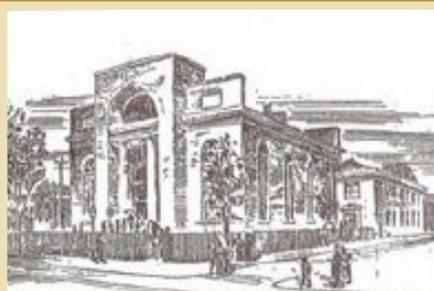
723 N BODINE ST PHILADELPHIA, PA 19123

# CHURCH BULLETIN

Vol. 14 No. 26 \* Sunday June 27, 2021 \* Editor: V. Rev. Fr. Nicolai Buga

## All Saints Sunday

Gospel Reading **Matthew 10: 32 - 38; 19: 27 - 30**



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The Lord said to his disciples, "Every one who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven; but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny him before my Father who is in heaven. He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and he who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me." Then Peter said in reply, "Lo, we have left everything and followed you.

What then shall we have?" Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of man shall sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And every one who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life. But many that are first will be last, and the last first."

Apostle Reading **Hebrews 11: 33 - 12: 2**



*Brothers*, through faith the prophets conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received their dead by resurrection. Others were tortured, refusing to accept release, in order to obtain a better resurrection. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned to death, they were sawn in two, they were killed by the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, persecuted, tormented – of whom the world was not worthy. They wan-

dered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground. Yet all these, though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better so that they would not, without us, be made perfect. Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

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**Synaxarion.** Sunday June 27 – All Saints Sunday (First Sunday after Pentecost): Holy Venerable Samson the Hospitable; Saint Joanna, the Myrrhbearer (fish allowed). Tuesday June 29 – Synaxis of Holy Apostles Peter and Paul

## Learning from Martyrs and Confessors

It is tempting to think that what we read about in the Scriptures and the history of the Church occurred in a world so different from ours that it has become irrelevant. This Sunday of All Saints reminds us that our Lord's fundamental calling to every generation does not change, but challenges the assumptions of every culture and the preferences of every human being. That calling is to participate personally in the holiness of God and to seek first His Kingdom, regardless of the cost.



When we hear today of our brothers and sisters in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia who are killed, abused, or become refugees due to their faithfulness to Jesus Christ, His words from today's gospel reading should come to mind: "Everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My Name's sake, will receive a hundred fold, and inherit eternal life. But many that are first will be last, and the last first." When we hear of terrorist attacks upon churches, the kidnapping of bishops and priests, and other atrocities, we should recall the graphic descriptions in Hebrews of the suffering of the Old Testament saints who hoped for the Messiah: "Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and scourging, even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were killed with the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, ill-treated—of whom the world was not worthy—wandering over deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth."

The first saints recognized by the Church were martyrs and confessors, people who accepted death or severe physical suffering instead of denying their Savior. As St. Polycarp said when urged to save his life by denying Christ, "For eighty and six years have I been his servant, and he has done me no wrong, and how can I blaspheme my King who saved me?" Whether at the hands of the pagan Romans, Persian and Islamic empires, Communists, Fascists, ISIS or other terrorist groups, countless Christians have made—and continue to make—the ultimate witness for the Lord. According to His promise, He will acknowledge them before the Father because they acknowledged Him in the most profound way possible.

For Orthodox Christians, the saints are not dead figures from the past, but alive in Christ. There is one Church in heaven and on earth, and we are members of the Body of Christ together with them. They are the white-robed martyrs around the throne of God who worship Him eternally.

We pray and worship God together with them, asking for their intercessions and seeking to follow their example of holiness. As our epistle reading states, "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfection of our faith." As shining examples of what it means to love and serve Christ, the saints inspire us to ever greater faithfulness to

Him. They are living proof that He has conquered death and that, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we may participate personally in His holy and eternal life. They point us to Him.

On this Sunday of All Saints, we commemorate all those who have entered in holiness into this great cloud of witnesses, especially those whose names we do not know. The Holy Spirit has revealed the names of many saints to the Church for our edification, but that is hardly an exhaustive list. And since humility is a necessary quality of holiness, that should not be surprising. When we remember the harsh realities of martyrdom and persecution through which they bore witness, it becomes immediately clear that the saintly path is not one of self-exaltation or pride. No, it is how those who are last — those who give up even life, family, and the most basic necessities — become first in a Kingdom not of this world.

Regardless of the country or time period in which we live, Christ calls us — no less than the martyrs and confessors — to acknowledge Him before others, to love Him even more than our families, and to take up our crosses. Today He calls us to be faithful witnesses to Him in a culture that has little place for principled self-restraint of any kind. **We live in a time when many worship at the altars of immediate gratification and self-indulgence in every area of life.** The selfishness, anger, hatred, and violence that we see so often in our culture reflect a failure to control our passions, which is a symptom of our collective disdain for putting anything or anyone before doing or saying whatever we feel like at the moment. **Holiness in the relationship between man and woman, as well as faithful self-sacrifice in rearing children, are strange goals in our age of promiscuity and pornography, when many see no higher standard in life than fulfilling whatever desires they happen to have at the moment.** Gluttony, greed, and trying obsessively to get what we want when we want it make many so spiritually and morally weak that they probably cannot even imagine living otherwise.

And the fact that we celebrate these ways of thinking and living in the name of freedom or being true to ourselves makes them all the more dangerous.

To be true to ourselves as human beings means to become holy, to direct all our desires to their ultimate fulfillment in the Lord, and to be healed from our self-imposed slavery to self-centered desire. The saints are icons of what it means to be true to ourselves as those created in God's image and likeness. The martyrs and confessors are shining examples of how to love and serve Christ above all else, and to order all our other attachments in light of our most fundamental commitment to Him. Their example calls us to acknowledge Him each day by living in this way. We acknowledge Him by taking up our crosses as we resist the pervasive temptations in our culture to worship ourselves, our possessions, our pleasures, and our loved ones. It may seem strange for Christ to warn against loving family members more than Him, but think for a moment how destructive it is for anyone to become a false god to another person. That kind of idolatry leads only to abuse, disappointment, and despair; we diminish ourselves and others when we do that. We distort marriage, family, and sex when we make them ends in themselves. It is far better to serve Christ in our family members through prayer, encouragement, and self-denial. That is how we and our loved ones will find fulfillment, blessing, and joy together as God's children.

Our path to holiness will likely be through our daily struggle to be faithful in small ways that few will notice or celebrate. The question is not whether to serve God through grand gestures or extraordinary circumstances, but whether there is something of the martyr and the confessor in each of us. That means dying to our self-centeredness out of love for Christ. That means loving people in Christ, ordering our relationships such that they fulfill His purposes for us and them, even when that requires suffering. And it means turning the other cheek and loving our enemies, even when we risk being rejected, criticized, or ignored for being out of step with the ways of the world.

No, that is not easy. But when we remember the martyrs and confessors and all that they endured— and still endure – for faithfulness to Christ, we should have confident hope that the same Lord Who strengthened them even to the shedding of blood will surely not abandon us in our smaller struggles each day. And unless we are faithful in small challenges, we will never be prepared for the large ones. “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfection of our faith.” It is through

His love, mercy, and grace that we too may share in the holiness that shines so brightly in all the saints.

**Fr. Philip LeMasters**

(Source: <https://blogs.ancientfaith.com>)

## HOLY TRINITY'S Liturgical Schedule from June 27 to July 4, 2021

### **Sunday June 27 (All Saints Sunday - First Sunday after Pentecost):**

9:00 am - Matins

10:00 am - Divine Liturgy

11:30 am - Sunday School

12:00 pm - Coffee hour

1:00 pm - Baptism Bogdan  
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### **Tuesday June 29 - Synaxis of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul:**

9:00 am - Matins

10:00 am - Divine Liturgy

12:00 pm - Coffee hour

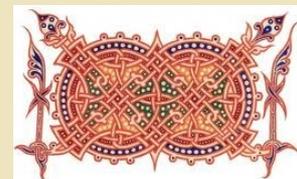
### **Sunday July 4 (Second Sunday after Pente- cost):**

9:00 am - Matins

10:00 am - Holy Liturgy

11:30 am - Sunday School

12:00 pm - Coffee Hour



## Homily for the Feast of Sts Peter and Paul

Brothers and sisters, we celebrate the Apostles Peter and Paul today.

What is it that defines the ministry of the Apostles?

The two Gospels show us. The first Gospel I want to speak about shortly and briefly, because I think the matinal Gospel is much more powerful for our needs.

Today many people were thinking many things about Jesus, but Peter knew Who He was. He said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."

To believe that Jesus is the Christ entails following His commandments because belief is not just a static thing; it is not just saying that we believe in a fact. It is dedicating ourselves. If we believe that Jesus is God, then we should obey Him. And the ministry of the Apostles was grounded in this fact.

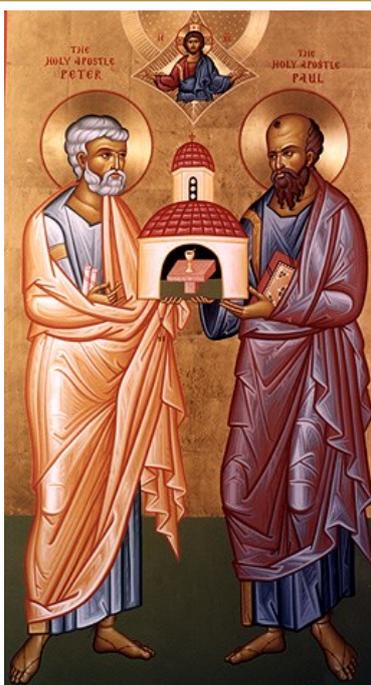
Even while others were saying all kinds of things, He might be Elias, Jeremiah, a prophet, John the Baptist; Peter knew. And so the Lord said this famous part of the Scriptures where He says, Thou art Simon, "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church." *The rock is the confession of Christ.*

Now, in our day and age, especially in the West, the idea of confession of Christ is just BELIEF. No, it is *LIVING according to the commandments* because Jesus is God, and because He is reliable, and He showed us the way, and it is the only way to life.

So that is the first aspect of the Apostles -- and it should be of us and of all the saints, and of course it was - the confession of Christ, to believe that Jesus is God, correctly, in every way - that means according to the Creed, according to the Seven Ecumenical Councils, according to the universal witness of the Church - Who Jesus is.

That's why it is so important to know Who He is. That's why it is so important that in our services; over and over and over again, we speak dogmatically of the nature of God and of the two natures of Christ, and of what His resurrection entails and how He was a man and how He was God. All these things are over and over again in our services. That's the reason. *Because without knowing Christ, we will know nothing.*

What is the application of this knowledge? It is what



happened in the first Gospel, that is, the Gospel for matins last night (John 21:15-25), happens to also be a resurrectional Gospel, one of the eleven of the cycle and one of my favorites. It's truly breathtaking in its scope.

The Lord has appeared on the shore; the Apostles have seen Him. Peter is so excited to see Him, he throws his fisher's cloak on him and he swims to shore and to the Lord. And then the Apostles follow, dragging the net full of fishes, one hundred fifty and three, and yet the net was not broken.

We could speak about that for a long time. This is very meaningful. The Apostles were prepared for their ministry by the three years. Remember that before, three years ago, they, when they caught the fish, their nets broke. But after seasoning with the

Lord, after learning of His ways and taking His yoke upon them, they were ready so they could truly be fishers of men. And those 153 fish, they include us. That's all of humanity. Because regarding the Apostles: "Their sound hath gone forth into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world" (Psalm 18:5; Romans 10:18). So we are part of those fish.

Then Peter is on the shore with the Apostles, and they have eaten. And then the Lord says to Simon, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me more than these?" He asks him, Do you love Me *with a love that is above all things?* Do you love Me *as God loves and as we should love God?* The word that He uses for "love" leaves no room for anything else. It is the love of God and a love for God. Now, in Greek there are three words for love.

Simon, only a few days before, remember, had rejected the Lord (John 13:37-38). He had denied Him three times. So he felt still shaky in his faith. He felt guilty. How would you feel? We'd feel guilty, right? We'd feel a sense of unworthiness.

So he says to the Lord, unsure of himself, he says, "I love You," but he used a different word (*phileo* - to have affection for somebody) - "I love you deeply, sincerely, as a friend, as a brother." And that is not how we should love God. But the Lord said, afterwards, "Feed My sheep." And then He said the same question again identically, and identically Peter answered it again, and the Lord said, "Feed My lambs."

Now, the third time the Lord wants to teach Simon something and us too. He said, Simon, son of Jonas, do you love Me *as a brother? Do you love me as a friend? Do you have great affection towards Me?* He didn't say, Do you love Me *as you would love God.* He used the same word for love that Simon had used the previous two times.

The Gospel says Peter was grieved because He said unto him the third time, Do you love me *as a friend, as a brother, but not as God?*" And Simon said, "Lord, Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love Thee."

Now, it is interesting to me also that at this point, Simon still uses the same word: I love you as a brother. But we know from his life that he loved Him as one would love God because we see the fruit of his life, the struggles that he went through. He was crucified for our Lord. We can see it in his epistles which have a striking clarity about the love of God and a peacefulness about them that can only be from someone who loves God with a whole heart. But at that moment Simon was still being prepared by the Lord. In time, he would show that he truly loved the Lord as one should love God.

What does this little vignette teach us? It teaches us that *the apostles were called to love the Lord with all their heart, all their soul, all their mind; just as we are.*

They weren't really called any differently than we are. The extent of their ministry is different, but the base of their ministry, the reason for their ministry, is the same as us, because they are responsible for the same commandments as we are. And they know the same God we know. But they loved the Lord with such power that it obliterated everything else.

And look at what they went through. The Apostle Paul gives a recounting of some of the things that happened to him. He was beaten with 40 stripes save one, five times. He was beaten with rods three times, shipwrecked three times. A day and a night he was in the water. There were many other things - hunger and thirst and nakedness and wondering what would happen the next day, and fear and all the other gamut of human emotions that happen when we have very difficult trials that we go through (2 Corinthians 11:24-28). It was the same for the Apostle Paul, for the Apostle Peter, for John, James, all the rest of them.

This is what we are called to do - to love God such that we will feed the sheep. The Lord talks a lot about love for Himself, but He mostly talks about how we should love our neighbor. If you read the Gospels, they are mostly about how we should relate to other human beings.

Why would this be?

Now, Saint John makes it very clear. If we say we love God Whom we have not seen, and we don't love our brother whom we have seen, we are liars, and the truth of God is not within us (1 John 4:16).

So, if we are Christians, we will love the brethren, and the brethren are *everyone*. Remember the parable about who is my neighbor? (Luke 10:25-37). *Everybody* is your neighbor. The mean ones, the kind ones, the honest ones, the thieves, the cruel, those who are good to you, those who are evil towards you, those who speak badly of you, those who praise you, those who would give you back something of what you have done for them, those who would spit in your face and take more beside. All of those are the sheep.

There are many things, especially in our society; we seem to be a society that's created weaknesses, created passions. People have passions for television or smoking or video games; there's a hundred and fifty other things that we can become addicted to that many of our brethren from the earlier age were not tempted by, because they had no access to these things. And there are still things you can be addicted to, for sure, but we have so many things in our society that it's very hard for us to pray, for us to be attentive.

And, yes, we should pray and be attentive. But here is the most important thing that you should do. I've told you many times.

Love your brethren – that is the most important thing. It's more important to love your brethren - and that's everybody - rather than it is to pray or to fast. If we love the brethren, then we are showing love for God. Now, we must pray and fast, of course. But if we only pray and fast and do not love the brethren, we will not be saved. It will not happen.

Let us emulate the apostles, brother and sisters. Let us first confess Christ. It doesn't mean just saying I believe in Jesus Christ - it means *living according to Who He is and what He taught*. And let us, above all things, love Him so that we would, above all things, consider it our life's mission to feed the lambs and feed the sheep.

May God grant us this blessed ministry. Amen.

**Fr. Seraphim Holland**

(2008)

(Source: <http://www.orthodox.net/>)