

## **Holiness, or the will to live under God's blessing**

These past Sundays we have been celebrating the descent of the Holy Spirit, the birthday of the Church. In the Orthodox tradition, the first Sunday after this feast is called "Sunday of All Saints". Why All Saints? Because they are living proof that holiness is not reserved for specific people, but rather for all who seek God's blessing. Holiness and blessing. These are not two trivial words. Instead, they are, or should be, the fundamental coordinates of our spiritual life, because through blessing and through our own efforts we can achieve holiness, the ideal of our spiritual life.

There are two aspects of the blessing that I would like to emphasise: the one who gives and the who receives the blessing. In the Orthodox Church and according to the liturgical tradition, this liturgical gesture can only be performed by a bishop or a priest, with the visible difference being that the bishop uses both hands, and the priest only uses the right hand in the blessing. Thus, once the priest confers the blessing by placing the right-hand fingers in the shape of the name of the Saviour Jesus Christ, he transmits the power of Christ. This is neither a greeting, nor a magical act, but of the very power of Christ, the Saviour (Acts 3:6).

Each blessing conferred by the priest or by the hallowing of icons makes us think of the Saviour Jesus Christ, for it is He who blesses all creation. During the Divine Liturgy, when the priest blesses those gathered in the holy place, he confesses that the blessing he gives is not his own, but that of God: "May the blessing of the Lord and His mercy come upon you by His divine grace and love for mankind, always, now and forever and to the ages of ages."

Who should receive the blessing? The simplest answer would be anyone who attends Church services. But this answer is insufficient, for I can personally attest that the blessing is simply God's invitation to live a healthier life. God's blessing is not intended to be received solely on an intellectual level, but to somehow make it the primary orientation by which you lead your life.

To live under God's blessing is above all to accept Him as the Lord of life, to let Him be the point of reference, the compass of one's life. We cannot live under God's blessing if we do not accept Him exactly as He is: The Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6), the One Who Is (Exodus 3:14), the Lord of Life and the Vanquisher of Death. The Ascension of Christ the Saviour did not leave the Apostles in sadness; on the contrary, they returned to Jerusalem with great joy, being blessed and blessing God (Luke 24:50-52).

To agree to say the Our Father is to abandon oneself to His will. And His will often clash with our will, with our own worldview. We live in a society where professing the name

of God is not favoured because the spirit of the world is often against the Church. To surrender to God's will is perhaps the greatest challenge faced by Christians in a humanistic world, focused on the humankind, rather than God, the Creator of the world, the true master of this world.

To live under God's blessing is to hope that everything will happen in its rightful time and in a way known only to God, but truly useful for life here on Earth and for eternity. In other words, to try to become holy.

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