



HOMILY FOR THE FEAST OF THE HOLY EQUAL-TO-THE-APOSTLES PRINCE VLADIMIR

Spoken on July 15, 1899 by the holy Patriarch Tikhon the Confessor, during his tenure as
Archbishop of the Aleutian Islands and Alaska

By God's Providence my visit to you, dear brethren, has coincided with the day when our Russian Orthodox Church gloriously commemorates the equal-to-the-apostles Prince Vladimir, the Enlightener of Russia. In keeping with the apostle's commandment to *remember them which have the rule over you* (Heb. 13:7), I will offer to you, brethren, for your instruction a discourse on who precisely was Prince Vladimir and why the Holy Church venerates him.

Holy Prince Vladimir was the prince of all Russia over 900 years ago, when Russia was not yet an Orthodox nation, when our ancestors did not yet know the true God, but were pagans and worshipped idols. Prince Vladimir also worshipped the idols. However, gifted by God with a bright mind and a heart sensitive to the truth, he could not but see that the idols were not God, that people worshipped them in vain, and that the pagan religion was a lie and a fallacy. And so the prince began pondering how to get to know the true God and find the true faith. When various peoples heard that the Russian prince wished to change his religion, they began to send their ambassadors to him, each praising his own faith. The Jews came, the Moslems came, and Germans came from the Pope; but Vladimir did not like their religions, while to the ambassadors of the Pope, who had strived even earlier to convert Russia to the Roman faith, the prince said: "Go away; our fathers did not accept you."

Engrave upon your minds and hearts, dear brethren, this wise reply of St. Vladimir. Although you possess the true faith and have no need or thought to change it, yet we live in a country where there are many religions and where some of them publicize themselves widely. I know that even in these parts representatives of various sects are not loath to spread their heresies among the Orthodox, especially young children, whom they take into their homes and orphanages. Not all of you will naturally be able, upon meeting them, to refute their heresies and prove the superiority and genuineness of the Orthodox faith; in such cases reply to them with the words of holy Prince Vladimir: "Go away; our fathers did not accept you." If the sectarians wish to talk about the faith, let them go to your spiritual father, while you should listen only to his voice and not to the false teachers.

Among those who came to Prince Vladimir there was also a Greek monk who spoke to him of the true faith, and Vladimir's soul inclined towards his words, but on the advice of his boyars (courtiers) he decided to first send a chosen delegation to the various peoples, to see how different people pray to God, what kind of lives they lead, and whose faith seemed the best. The delegates visited many different countries, but did not like any of the faiths therein. However, when they came to Constantinople and attended an Orthodox service there, it so captivated and enraptured them that they thought they were in heaven and not on earth; and so they immediately decided that the Orthodox faith is the only true faith.

This shows you, dear brethren, how important to faith are God's church and the services therein. The church is God's home, His primary abode on earth. Here a Christian learns the Lord's commandments and is enlightened by the light of belief in Christ; here he is sanctified by the sacraments and receives an

abundant outpouring of the grace of the Holy Spirit, which heals his spiritual and physical maladies; here his prayers are intensified by the prayers of a multitude of believers, clergymen, and the Heavenly Host itself, which serves together with us invisibly. In view of this, there is little need to urge you with many words to come to church as often as possible; in this matter you should follow the example of the Old Testament righteous one (King David), who rejoiced when summoned to the church, whose soul rushed towards it like a deer to a pure stream of water, and who asked God for one thing only: to live in God's home, and gaze upon the Lord's beauty, and visit His holy temple.

While coming to church, dear brethren, you should also concern yourself with its adornment. It is sinful before God, shameful before other people, and damning for our souls if we allow God's churches to be in a poor state. King David did not wish to live in a rich palace made of cedar while the Ark of the Covenant stood in a tent. The Lord loves those who love the magnificence of His home, and will bestow His great mercy and rich boons upon them. Whoever is concerned for his church and donates towards its decoration, to such a one the Lord sends earnings which can easily satisfy all daily needs. Furthermore, by giving some of your bounties to God's church, you also prepare for yourselves treasure in heaven, "where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not steal" (Matt. 6:20).

When the delegates told Vladimir about the Orthodox faith and services, he decided to convert to Orthodoxy, was baptized himself, and baptized his people. Moreover, the Prince did not become Christian in name only, but became an entirely different person, changing completely from the way he had led his life as a pagan: he restrained his sensual passions, abandoned his former sinful habits, became abstinent, meek, merciful, and only thought of how to please God by means of his new life, which he was able to achieve with the help of God.

Thus we, too, dear brethren, having been baptized in Christ, must *put off the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts*, leave off sinful thoughts, feelings, and actions, and *put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness* (Ephes. 4:22, 24), and live strictly according to Christ's commandments. But do we always do so? Do we always fulfill our Christian duties? Towards what are our cares, efforts, and thoughts directed: towards glorifying God through our good works and serving Him alone, or exclusively towards our earthly needs, such as food, clothing, housing? We are Christians, but what kind of life do we lead? Do we not sometimes commit deeds for which our faith and the name of Christ are reviled?! Let us not try to justify ourselves by blaming the weakness of human nature, or the fact that man is not an angel and cannot be sinless: the example of Saint Vladimir shows us that even a sinner with grey hair, i.e. with long-ingrained habits, can with the help of God leave off his worldly deeds and become adorned with the royal mantle of good deeds.

Having become a Christian, the holy Prince Vladimir concerned himself with the enlightenment of the Russian people: to this end he established parish schools and commanded his subjects to enroll their children therein, in order to have them instructed in the law of God.

Dear brethren! Your school has a wise saying written on the wall: "Knowledge is light, while ignorance is darkness." This applies especially to the knowledge of the truths of faith. Can someone who knows nothing of God, of the salvation of the world, of eternal life, of the soul be truly called a Christian? In order to believe, one must first know what to believe in, while in order to know, one must first study. Thus, if you desire true benefit and good for your children, send them to the parish school: here they will learn the fear of God, which is the beginning of all wisdom, and from here they will come out good Christians and true believers.

Saint Vladimir peacefully reposed in the Lord on July 15, 1015, and the Church glorified him as a saint for his God-pleasing life and for his great and holy work of baptizing Russia, from whence 100 years ago the light of Christianity illuminated these countries, too. Thus we now celebrate his repose, being his people (from the troparion to St. Vladimir), and we pray to the Lord, Who has chosen Vladimir as a second Paul (from the troparion), – we pray in the words of St. Vladimir himself, spoken at the baptism of Russia: “O great and wondrous God! Look down upon Thy new people; grant them, O Lord, to know Thee, the true God, and establish among them the right and unaltered faith!” Amen.

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