

Life of St. John of Kronstadt, Patron Saint



St. John of Kronstadt (1829-1908), a parish priest in Kronstadt, a naval base on the outskirts of St. Petersburg, a wonderful preacher, great man of prayer, humble, ascetic, great friend to the poor, a great miracle worker, known throughout Russia and the West for his powerful intercessory prayer.

The life of the pastor of Kronstadt

On October 19, 1829, in the far north of Russia, a weak and sickly child, named John (Ioann), was born in the family of Ilia Sergiyev, church reader in the village of Sura in the Archangelsk province. This child was the future luminary of Christ's Church.

From his earliest years Vanya went with his father to their poor and humble church, served in the altar, loved the service books, became very pious. His favorite book was the Holy Gospel. All of this became a firm religious foundation for the boy in his later long and glorious life in Christ.

Learning came very hard to Vanya in his childhood, which sorrowed him greatly, but also served to spur him on to especially fervent prayers to God for help. And a miracle occurred! Once, during his sojourn in his religious school, after a fervent prayer during the night, the boy experienced a sudden shiver all over his body, and it was as though a

curtain fell from his eyes, as though his mental sight opened up, and he experienced lightness and joy in his soul. After that night the boy immediately began reading with great ease, began to comprehend and memorize everything with the greatest facility. He finished his school at the top of his class, graduated from the Archangelsk Seminary in first place, and entered the St. Petersburg Religious Academy.

His spiritual development proceeded even more successfully. In the academy St. John dreamed of missionary work among the native tribes of North America and Siberia; however, observation showed that the residents of St. Petersburg did not know Christ any better than the aborigines of other countries. While pondering his aspirations, St. John repeatedly saw a childhood vision: he saw himself as a priest in a certain cathedral and accepted it as a sign from above. After graduating from the academy in 1855, St. John was ordained a priest. Upon first entering the St. Andrew Cathedral in Kronstadt, to which he had been assigned, he stood stock-still on the threshold: this was the very church that had been revealed to him many years before in his childhood vision! St. John spent the rest of his life and pastoral activity in Kronstadt. Many people even forgot St. John's surname (Sergiyev), and even he himself signed as John of Kronstadt.

After graduating from the academy, St. John wrote in his diary: "I've learned a great deal. Glory to Thee, O Lord! But I wish to know more. My spirit thirsts for knowledge. My heart is not satisfied, not sated. I am studying and will continue to study," Stepping onto the path of independent life with such sentiments, the young pastor continued his book learning with great zeal. But already from the very first days of his priesthood St. John began his spiritual labor of engaging in charitable deeds of love, deliberately keeping them secret. Although afterwards he would say that he was not leading an ascetic life, these words were spoken by him out of deep humility. In reality, while concealing from people his spiritual feats, St. John was the greatest ascetic, and he began implementing the knowledge of conquering the self from the first days of his priesthood. Prayer and fasting constituted the foundation of his spiritual labors, as well as abstinence, and that not only in food, but also in all emotions. The daily serving of the liturgy alone, which St. John took on as a rule, required extensive fasting according to Orthodox church rule. However, St. John did not limit himself to daily services, constant prayer at all times and in all places, divine contemplation, fasting, and abstinence. From his first days as a priest he dedicated himself to serving the poor and the destitute, always sought them out and found them, helped them, took care of the ill, comforted those in despair, bringing to all not only the words of Christ, but also His living love and light. "There are many happy families without us, Liza. Let us dedicate ourselves to serving God," – St. John, virginal to the end of his days, would say to his wife Elizabeth.

Daily St. John went among the poor and the destitute of Kronstadt, spoke with them, comforted them, looked after the sick, and helped them financially according to his

resources. Actually not even according to resources, but way beyond them, for quite often the young pastor came home without his overcoat or boots, having given them away to the poor. All of this became a habit, a rule; but such a life gave rise to attacks upon St. John from all sides. He was chastised by his own family, he was mocked by others, he was berated by his spiritual superiors. For some reason the uniqueness of the young priest's Christian life irritated those around him. He was called a fool-for-Christ. The diocesan administration forbade his salary to be given into his hands (because, upon receiving it, he gave it away to the poor to the very last penny), called him in for explanations. But St. John bravely endured all these trials without changing his lifestyle. And with the help of God he triumphed over everyone and everything, and for all the things for which in the first years of priesthood he had been mocked, abused, maligned, and persecuted, – he was subsequently glorified, as it became understood that he was a true disciple of Christ, a genuine pastor who gave his life for his people. "One must love every person, both in his sin and in his shame... One should not confuse the individual, who is an image of God, with the evil that is within him." Without such sentiments it would have been unlikely for St. John to have been able to mollify those to whom he reached out – the beggars of Kronstadt, most of whom had been sent out of the capital for drunkenness and begging. Here St. John was met not only with rudeness, but often with hostility, enmity, aggravation. St. John's patience and love overcame everything, and the results of his spiritual labors may be seen from the following example, one of a great many, recounted in the letter of a simple craftsman: "At that time I was 22-23 years of age. Now I am an old man, but I still remember well the first time I saw batyushka. I had a family, two children. I worked and drank. The family went hungry. My wife quietly begged on the side. We lived in a ramshackle hut. One day I came home not too drunk and saw a young priest sitting inside, holding my son in his arms and saying something to him very lovingly. The child listened to him quite intently. It seemed to me that batyushka looked like Christ in that picture called "The Blessing of the Children." At first I wanted to curse: why was he hanging around here?... but batyushka's loving and solemn eyes stopped me: I felt ashamed. I lowered my eyes, while he continued to look at me, looking straight into my soul. He began to talk. I cannot even hope to reproduce all that he said. He spoke about my hut being like paradise, because wherever there are children, all is light and warmth there, and that I should not trade this paradise for the smoky atmosphere of a bar. He did not accuse me, – no, he kept excusing me, only I did not feel like being excused... He left, while I just continued sitting there quietly... I didn't cry, although my soul was on the brink of tears. My wife kept looking at me... And ever since that time I became a decent man again..."

Such was the faith in Christ and the love with which St. John burned from day to day, from year to year, without a single thought for human glory and other worldly vanity, preaching the light yoke of Christ to hard-working and burdened people, abnegating his own self, wearing himself out with fasting and prayer, drawing upon himself hostility and

aggravation from envious and hardhearted people.

In addition, St. John was a wonderful preacher. He set himself the rule of reading a sermon at every service. He did not seek eloquence, but spoke simply and often without any special preparation. His sermons had a strong effect on the common people. In reading these sermons in print, one is struck by their depth of thought, extraordinary theological learning, and simplicity and power of each word. All thoughts, all deeds, each minute of his life were committed by St. John to the glory of God, so that it was not surprising that his sermons were endowed with the strength of Christ.

Thus through St. John – through his prayers and fasting, through his love-filled deeds, and through his inspired words – the light of Christ illuminated the embittered and wretched Russian people. In turn, these wretched people were the first witnesses of his miraculous healings. The vagrants of Kronstadt were the first to discover St. John's holiness, but his discovery soon spread all over Russia with the assistance of the righteous Paraskeva, who had been sent to serve God's servant St. John, who was still hidden from the world at that time.

The gift of miracle-working made St. John renowned far beyond the bounds of Russia. It is totally impossible to enumerate all his miracles, a considerable number of which concerned the poor and illiterate people, who were unable to describe or publish what they had seen. Moreover, not all the press was sympathetic to St. John either. The atheistic intelligentsia and its press suppressed news of the manifestations of God's power, while in 1905 they made use of the freedom of the press to abuse and malign St. John. Nevertheless, many of his miracles were recorded and retained in memory. The gravest illnesses, before which medical people stood in total helplessness, were healed by his prayers and placing of hands. The healings usually took place secretly (privately), but sometimes the miracles occurred also in the presence of a multitude of people. St. John healed all those who appealed to him, including Moslems, Jews, foreigners from France, Italy, Switzerland, America, and other countries. There remains an exact report of St. John's own description of his very first miracle. He described it to his fellow priests as follows: he once received an appeal to pray for a sick person; St. John began to pray; and, as usual, "I entrusted the sick one into God's hands, asking the Lord to fulfill His holy will in regard to the sick person." But unexpectedly there appeared an old woman whom St. John revered for her righteousness (this was the above-mentioned Paraskeva) and demanded that St. John pray for the absolute healing of the sick person. "I remember that I felt almost scared then," said St. John. "I thought to myself: how can I have such daring? However, the old woman insisted and believed in the power of my prayer. Then I confessed my lowliness and my sinfulness before the Lord, saw God's will in this matter, and began to plead for the sick person to be healed. He became well... Another time the healing occurred again after my prayers. Then I saw in these two cases the direct will of God, a new obedience for me from God – to pray for all those who would ask it of me..."

From the lives of the saints we know that the gift of miracle-working was given by God to His saints as a reward for their great labors, their prayerful endeavors, their fasting, deeds of love, compassion. We have seen that each day in the life of St. John was a day of great spiritual labor. And for this the Lord Jesus Christ, Whom he served so faithfully and zealously, glorified him.

St. John spent almost 25 years in his spiritual labors known only to the common people of the city of Kronstadt and partially St. Petersburg. He performed his labor of love and his service to the Heavenly King with humility and meekness. And it was not he, the ascetic who had given up the world and his own self, who needed glory. "Not to us, not to us, Lord, but to Thy name give glory." By God's special providence and through the previously-mentioned righteous Paraskeva the glorification of St. John and the revelation of Christ's luminary to all of Russia took place. The Lord appointed St. John to be not only the pastor of Kronstadt, but of all of Russia.



St. John of Kronstadt

The entire believing part of Russia streamed to the miracle-worker. This glory, which to many seemed enviable, was a new and very onerous burden for St. John. Formerly, he himself used to go out to people solely within the bounds of his city. Some small freedom of movement and unrestricted time remained. Thus, for over 20 years St. John taught the Law of God in the city schools. Now even this small iota of freedom disappeared. Thousands of people from all ends of Russia daily arrived in Kronstadt, seeking help from St. John; he received an even greater number of letters and telegrams. It was physically impossible for one person to cope with such a number of requests; the need arose for having secretaries, the teaching of the Law of God had to be ceased, necessity dictated the institution of general confession as a rule and private ones as an exception.

In this manner the second part of St. John's life and pastoral activity outwardly differed considerably from the first. Let us look closely at how St. John now spent his time, in order to understand the burden and the majesty of his spiritual labor. St. John got up at 3 A.M. and prepared for serving the matins in the cathedral. For a brief while he took a turn around the garden of his parish house, praying silently. Around 4 A.M. he went off to the cathedral. At the gates of his house he was met by a waiting crowd of pilgrims. He could speak individually with only a few of them. The majority were content to just receive his blessing, kiss the hand of the miracle-worker, touch his garments, catch his luminous gaze. At the cathedral St. John was met by hundreds of local beggars, to whom he gave charity according to established custom. At 4:00 began the matins, which St. John served without curtailing a single hymn and read all the canons himself. Before the beginning of the liturgy there was confession. Afterwards, without leaving the church, St. John began to serve the liturgy. The cathedral, which could hold up to 5,000 people, was usually full of the faithful, so that communion took a long time, and the liturgy never ended before 12 noon. During the service letters and telegrams were brought to St. John straight into the altar, and he immediately read them and prayed over them. After the service, surrounded by thousands of the faithful, St. John left the cathedral and went to St. Petersburg in response to summons from countless numbers of sick people, from whom he returned home not earlier than 12 midnight, sometimes catching an hour of sleep on the train. And at 3 A.M. he got up again. Many nights St. John did not go to sleep at all (he prayed instead), yet no one ever saw him tired or drowsy. If we think carefully about the manner of life that was led by St. John, we will readily understand that only by God's miracle could one live and work thus for decades. Such a life and such labors were above human powers; they were supernatural. Only earthly angels and celestial humans, as it is said of saints, can live like that.

In spite of being so busy, St. John found time to keep a spiritual diary, wherein he recorded on a daily basis all the thoughts that came to him during prayer and contemplation, as a result of the grace-filled illumination of his soul by the Holy Spirit. These thoughts filled up an entire wonderful book, published under the title "My Life in

Christ.” This book represents a true spiritual treasure-trove and will for all ages remain a witness to how the great saint lived and how should live all those who wish not only to be called, but actually be, Christians. The basic idea of all of St. John’s writings is the need to have sincere and ardent faith in God and to live according to faith, the need for constant battle against passions and vices, and the need to be loyal to the faith and the Orthodox Church as the only source of salvation.

For his native land Russia St. John was like a thundering prophet of God – preaching truth, denouncing lies, summoning to repentance, and forecasting God’s imminent vengeance for sin and apostasy. Being himself an image of meekness and humility, love for every person, irrespective of nationality or religion, St. John adopted an attitude of great indignation towards those godless, materialistic, and liberal trends, which subverted the faith of the Russian people and sabotaged Russia’s thousand-year-old government. Subsequent events of the bloody Russian Revolution and the triumph of the godless and inhumane Bolshevism showed how right was the great saint of the Russian land in his warnings and prophetic visions.

St. John stayed in Livadia during the last days of the life of Emperor Alexander III, and the Sovereign’s very repose took place in his presence. The ailing Sovereign met St. John with the words: “I dared not invite you on my own. Thank you for coming. Please pray for me. I am quite ill.” This was on October 12, 1904. After the Sovereign prayed on his knees together with St. John, there was a considerable amelioration in the Emperor’s condition. This continued for 5 days; on October 17th things got worse again. In the last hours of his life the Sovereign said to St. John: “You are a holy man. You are a righteous man. This is why the Russian people love you.” “Yes,” said St. John, “your people love me.”

Together with glory and honor, large sums of money flowed to St. John for the purpose of charity. The amounts of these monetary sums may be judged only approximately, since St. John immediately gave everything away. Only postal receipts were recorded. According to people close to St. John, a good million rubles a year passed through his hands. He took in with one hand and gave out with the other. There were cases like the following: once, in the midst of a huge crowd, St. John received a packet from a merchant’s hands and without opening it, immediately passed it into an outstretched hand of a beggar. The merchant became agitated: “Batyushka, there are a thousand rubles there!” – “His luck,” calmly replied St. John. Sometimes, however, he refused to accept donations from certain people. There is the well-known case where he did not accept 30,000 rubles from a wealthy widow. This case was a prime example of St. John’s clairvoyance, since the woman had gotten this money in a tainted manner, for which she subsequently repented.

St. John did a great many charitable deeds with these donations. He daily fed a thousand beggars. In Kronstadt he set up a House of Industry, comprising a school, a church, workshops, and an orphanage. In his native village he founded a convent and

built a stone church, and in St. Petersburg, on Karpovka Street, he founded another convent (in which he was later buried).

Having attained a high level of prayerful contemplation and impassivity, St. John calmly accepted and put on the rich vestments presented to him by his venerators, since these vestments were for the glory of God and not his own. Moreover, they even served to conceal his spiritual feats. But the donations he received he gave away to the very last penny.

St. John reposed on December 20, 1908, having foretold the day of his death. Tens of thousands of people attended his funeral, and a multitude of miracles occurred at his tomb, both then and in the times that followed.

His was a truly extraordinary funeral. Throughout the entire expanse from Kronstadt to Oranienbaum and from the Baltic train station in St. Petersburg to the St. John monastery one could see crowds of weeping people: “Batyushka, our batyushka, wherefore are you leaving us?” – desperately cried the common people. The people’s tears at the funeral were so bitter and sincere, that at times even the singers of the Pavlov Life-Guards regiment could not refrain from crying. The mournful ringing of the bells, the quiet flickering of the candles in the gathering darkness of the foggy St. Petersburg evening, the singing of the funereal canon, and the tears of the people – all merged into a majestic and mighty accord that will long not be forgotten by witnesses of this event.



The pastor of Kronstadt

Never before was there an occasion where such a multitudinous crowd of people was struck by the sorrow of a common loss. St. Petersburg remembers the ten thousand people attending the funeral of Emperor Alexander II, remembers the thirty thousand people at Dostoyevsky's funeral, but the multitude of sorrowing Orthodox people (not less than sixty thousand) that were present at the funeral of the Kronstadt pastor – that is an unprecedented event, the like of which no one can remember. Thus Russia bid farewell to the pastor who himself was the image of the people's goodness, the people's conscience, the people's faith...

What does the life of St. John of Kronstadt teach us? Truly it was a great sign of the times, sent to Russia on the eve of its unimaginable catastrophe. In the person of St. John, as in a droplet of water, was reflected the sun of the great soul of the Russian people: unshakeable faith in Christ, simplicity, humility, meekness. St. John came from the common people and retained this simplicity of origin, simultaneously uniting with it a great mind and a wide array of knowledge. St. John was truly an image of the multi-million Russian people, a mirror reflecting the bright characteristics of Holy Russia. In

him were merged and reflected the feelings of tsar and peasant, merchant and nobleman, rich man and beggar, – all those who embraced in their heart the commandments of Christ.

The righteous St. John of Kronstadt was canonized by the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad on November 1, 1964.

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The one thing needful

(From the spiritual diary of St. John of Kronstadt, "My Life in Christ")

What do I need? There is nothing on earth that I need, except that which is most essential. What do I need, what is most essential? I need the Lord, I need His grace, His kingdom within me. On earth, which is the place of my wanderings, my temporary being, there is nothing that is truly mine, everything belongs to God and is temporal, everything serves my needs temporarily. What do I need? I need true and active Christian love; I need a loving heart which takes compassion on its neighbors; I need joy over their prosperity and well-being, and sorrow over their sorrows and illnesses, their sins, failings, disorders, woes, poverty; I need warm and sincere compassion for all the circumstances of their lives, joy for those who are joyous and tears for those who are in tears. Enough of selfishness, egoism, living only for oneself and acquiring everything only for oneself: riches, pleasures, the glory of this world; enough of spiritual dying instead of living, grieving instead of rejoicing, and carrying within oneself the poison of selfishness, for selfishness is a poison that is continuously poured into our hearts by Satan. O, let me cry out with King David: *Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides Thee. My flesh and my heart fail, but God is the strength of my heart.* Grant me, O Lord, true life, dispel the darkness of my passions, disperse their power with Thy strength, *for with Thee all things are possible*

St. John of Kronstadt's power of healing

All of St. John of Kronstadt's earthly suffering was also tied in with the fact that he dared to selflessly help people with his power of healing, expelling demons from them or the malignant illnesses that the latter sent upon them. St. John, who possessed the power of forbidding demons to dwell in people, acquired unique experience in the following: (1) testing the power of God and the grace of priestly resources and the Holy Fathers' prayers of exorcism against the demons; (2) identifying the presence of demons in a person on the sole basis of external appearance, behavior, and in private conversation with him; (3) cleansing people of demons, thus voluntarily drawing upon himself the inevitable physical and mental suffering resulting from the demons' revenge; (4) becoming convinced, as he gained practice, that in actuality the Lord helped people to

combat demons through him not when he himself wished it, but only when he was called upon by God through the sick person's faith in him as a healer, for such faith also came from God.

Varied and instructive were the methods practiced by St. John for the expulsion of demons and the comprehensive healing of all attendant illnesses and sorrows. But a common factor in them was the healing prayer composed by the saint: "O Lord, Thou said that whatever we asked for in Thy name, Thou would do it for us Thyself, and Thou also said that the heavens and earth would pass, but Thy words would not pass, and that not a single stroke or iota of the law would pass. Therefore, I entreat Thee in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, forgive Thy servant (name) all his sins, both voluntary and involuntary, and heal him."

St. John always read this prayer so fervently, as though he did not even ask, but demanded from God forgiveness of the sick person's sins. St. John traveled all over Russia in response to summons from the sick, but most frequently he read the healing prayer from afar, as soon as he received their telegrams. In such cases, the turning point in the illness usually occurred at the time of the reading of the healing prayer. In 1904, at a meeting with the clergy of the city of Sarapul, St. John described to them how he arrived at the daring to pray for the healing of all the sick people of Russia (and later – of the whole world). One time in Kronstadt batyushka was asked to pray for an ailing man. St. John prayerfully gave the man over into God's hands and asked that His holy will for the sick person be fulfilled. When the sick man got well as a result, this became widely known, and the faithful insistently began to ask batyushka to pray for the health of various sick people. At first he refused out of a humble realization of his unworthiness and sinfulness, but the faithful forced their pastor to once again pray for another sick man. This was also successful, and afterwards St. John no longer refused his help in such cases.

As to what the blessed pastor of Kronstadt experienced in all of this, and how difficult it was to earn from God forgiveness of sins and healing, – St. John himself described it thus: "The Lord, as an artful physician, subjects us to various trials, sorrows, illnesses, and misfortunes, in order to purify us like gold in the furnace. A soul that is hardened in various sins does not easily undergo cleansing and healing, but has to be forced to a great extent, and only through lengthy experience in patience and suffering does it become accustomed to virtue and begins to love God, from Whom it was alienated after becoming attached to all kinds of mortal sins. Such is the purpose of the trials and tribulations sent to us by God in this life."

During personal contact with various sick people in difficult and hopeless cases, St. John was often drenched in sweat during prayer, or was subjected to attacks from those possessed by demons. In the majority of cases, quick and complete healing usually

occurred right away. For Orthodox people St. John was accustomed to pray for help solely by himself, while in the case of other believers or non-believers, he forced the sick person's relatives who had appealed to him to pray jointly with him. For complete healing of those possessed by demons, he forced the unfortunates to look him straight in the eye and to make the sign of the cross independently several times. To the healing prayer St. John frequently added a special moleben, took out particles for the sick during the liturgy, gave them communion, and also sent them items that belonged to him or food blessed by him.

There were times when he could not help people for whom he was asked to pray (due to the latter's unbelief), but he readily helped those who asked him themselves, if he saw God's will in that. In such cases he simply made them the recipients of divine mercy without providing any explanation.

In several confirmed cases St. John was even able to resurrect the dead, and on one particular occasion he returned to life a corpse that had already begun to decompose, just as did our Lord Jesus Christ in resurrecting Lazarus who had been dead for four days. After the saint's repose, his miraculous healings of people did not cease, but continued as a result of praying to him, prayerfully touching objects that had belonged to him, and also during his appearance to sick people in dream visions. The saint saved not only those who were dying from grave illnesses, but also those who found themselves in difficult circumstances of life; he helped establish successful family life, delivered people from ruinous passions, and also saved many Russian people during the time of the brutal Red terror, turning many of the persecutors, moreover, onto a path of repentance and atonement for their godlessness.

In healing some of the illnesses, the saint used symbolic actions – embraced and drew the sick person to himself, struck the place of illness from the outside, etc. The possessed ones he healed by sprinkling them with holy water, pressing a cross to their forehead, giving them holy water to drink and prosfory sanctified in their name to eat, and finally giving them the Holy Mysteries. The possessed ones who were brought to him spewed out blasphemies and curses at the saint, spit upon him and the cross he presented to them, tried to beat him up, but his humble prayer for them before the altar inevitably succeeded in the end.

However, there were cases where instead of his usual help the saint either foretold the sick person's unavoidable death or refused help completely. The most prominent of such cases was the repose of Tsar Alexander III, which the saint at first tried to put off by laying his hands on the Sovereign's head. Prior to his death the Tsar was tormented by the most severe headaches. The laying of St. John's hands caused the headaches to disappear, and thus the saint spent many hours near the dying anointed Sovereign, but could not prevent his repose. Such was the will of God.

It was noted that the saint could not prevent the death of sick people in cases where it was ordained by God not so much for the sins of these individuals, who were known for their righteousness, but for the sins of all the people, as in the case of the Tsar's repose, or for the mortal sins of parents when their children died. The saint also could not prevent death in cases where the sick person lived among sinful surroundings and did not have enough willpower to combat them. In such a case the grave illness with its attendant suffering served as a purifying factor for the salvation of the soul, while a continued sinful life was displeasing to God. In these cases the saint even refused to pray for healing.

St. John of Kronstadt and the patristic inner prayer

Of great merit is St. John's work in preaching the patristic inner prayer to Russia. St. John wrote that "the vision of God is a requisite for prayer." St. John himself was granted visions of spiritual forces, both of the lower and higher order. Once a certain abbess stood together with St. John near one of the bridges across Neva River, while a funeral procession passed by them. The saint told the abbess that he saw demons in the procession, who were rejoicing over the perdition of a drunkard's soul. On August 15, 1989, on the day of the Dormition of the Holy Virgin, for the first time in his life St. John was granted a vision of the Mother of God and heard Her blessed voice calling him "a dearest child of the Heavenly Father."



St. John of Kronstadt

In view of the fact that when starting upon inner prayer, novices suffer from the wandering of thoughts that is inflicted upon them by the devil, St. John offers practical advice on how to overcome this impediment. He writes that in prayer “there is the sin of inattention to which we all are subjected terribly; we should not forget it, but repent of it; we are inattentive not only at home, but also in church. When you do your rule of prayer, especially by the prayer book, say the words of the prayers with heartfelt strength, do not hurry from word to word without having felt its sincerity, without having instilled it into your heart, but work constantly at feeling with your heart the sincerity of all that you are saying. Many church readers, who read with facility, end up with false prayer: with their lips they appear to be praying, they seem to be pious, but their hearts are dormant and do not know what the lips are saying. This happens as a result of their hurrying and not thinking over with their heart what they are saying. Only those can pray quickly without harming their prayer, who have learned to engage in inner prayer with a pure heart. All others should wait until each word of prayer is echoed in their own hearts. Sometimes it is well to say a few words of prayer of one’s own, full of ardent faith and love for the Lord.

We should not always converse with God using the words of others, we should not forever remain infants in faith and hope, but should manifest our own mind, offer from our hearts our own good words; moreover, we get used to the words of others and our prayer becomes cold. And how pleasing to God is our own babble, which issues directly from a believing and grateful heart.”

Out of his own spiritual experience the saint offers us the following revelation: “Try to achieve a child-like simplicity in your dealings with people and in your prayer to God. Simplicity is man’s greatest blessing and merit. God is absolutely simple, because He is absolutely spiritual, absolutely good. May your heart, too, refrain from dividing into good and evil.”

Speaking of his own endeavors with the Jesus prayer, St. John writes: “When you have Christ in your heart, make sure you do not lose Him and together with Him your inner tranquility, for it is bitterly hard to begin anew; all your efforts to attach yourself once again to Him after falling away will be hard and will cause many bitter tears. Cling to Christ with all your might, attach yourself to Him and do not lose your sacred connection with Him. Christ, introduced into the heart through faith, dwells there in peace and joy. When you notice that your heart is cold and unwilling to pray – stop and warm your heart with some dynamic vision – for example, of your iniquity, of your spiritual poverty and blindness, or of God’s great and continuous blessings upon you and all of mankind, especially Christians, – and afterwards continue to pray unhurriedly, with warm feeling; even if you do not have time to finish all your prayers, that does not present a problem, since much greater benefit accrues from warm and unhurried prayer than from reading all the prayers without any feeling. It is well to pray continuously, but not all are capable of such an effort, thus to each his own. Whoever is unable to cope with lengthy prayer should preferably pray briefly, but with an ardent soul. One should ceaselessly address the Lord and be with Him every single moment, in order to avoid being overcome by demonic irritation or dejection. By using the spirit of dejection, the enemy has led many people away from the narrow and salvific path and unto the wide and smooth path of perdition. While praying count yourself for nothing and accept prayer as a great gift from God. Pray without any hesitation, with heartfelt simplicity: just as it is easy to think, so should it be easy to pray. Prayer is the breath of the soul just as air is the breath of the body. Our souls breathe with the Holy Spirit. One cannot utter a single heartfelt word without the Holy Spirit. While praying you are conversing directly with the Lord, and if your heart is open through faith and love, you will at the same time breathe in the spiritual blessings issuing from Him. Learn to pray, force yourself to pray; at first it will be hard, but afterwards, the more you force yourself, the easier it will get, but initially you must always force yourself. When you pray to God, look with the eyes of your heart inside yourself, at your soul. The Lord is there, in your thoughts and in the movements of your heart, just as He is outside of you and everywhere. The heart’s insensitivity to the genuineness of the words of prayer comes from disbelief and insensitivity of one’s

one sinfulness, which comes, in turn, from a hidden feeling of pride. From his feelings during a prayer a person can discover whether he is full of pride or humility: the more ardent is his prayer, the humbler he is, and the more insensitive the prayer – the greater his pride.”

All these instructions on the part of St. John concerning prayer are aimed at novices, since they concern mostly verbal prayer and only the beginnings of inner prayer. The saint himself, however, had attained the supreme gift of constant inner prayer, which was confirmed by Hieromonk Nikander of Valaam: “In truth, Father John’s face bloomed with God’s grace, with constant inner prayer. During the sanctification of the Holy Gifts, Father John submersed himself entirely in inner prayer, his face became wondrously transfixed, and it was apparent that he did not see those around him and even tarried in saying the priest’s exclamations. Deep and ardent prayer attracted him completely to God.” The Muscovite judge Peter Pavlovich Yastrebov also confirmed that while St. John served the divine liturgy, during the priest’s prayers in the altar he was granted spiritual visions. At such moments the saint seemed to be somewhere far away, seemed to be conversing with God, Whom he clearly saw in front of him on the altar table. Such moments left an indelible impression on the faithful.

St. John of Kronstadt and the enemies of Christ

Beginning with St. Cyprian of Carthage, the majority of martyred Christian priests and monastics earned their martyric crowns precisely due to the vengeance of demons, whom they exorcized from God’s creations. Such a lot also befell St. John, who worked earnestly in this field and thus earned the demons’ violent hatred and lust for revenge. Since holy people like St. John no longer fear the demons’ visible appearance, having the power from God to exorcize them, the demonic vengeance upon St. John took place through the pagan people who serve them, through unbelieving priests, atheists, heretics, Catholics, and Jews, who slandered him in their press and used every opportunity to do him physical harm.

Let us first look at St. John’s false friends, who subsequently turned out to be his actual enemies, for they attempted to link their godless affairs with his holy name. In reality, guided by the holy principle that “for God there are neither Hellenes, nor Jews,” St. John generously offered charity to all who asked for his help, including those of other faiths. It is known for sure that in 1900 he donated an array of bells to a Catholic church and gave significant contributions to Jewish, Tatar, and Chinese charity organizations.

However, when an Imperial manifesto came out in September 1905 on the participation of political parties in the work of the National Duma, the first leaders of the nationalistic Black Hundreds party turned to St. John with a request to bless their activity as an “Alliance of the Russian People,” so that the organized left would not be the only party

represented in the Duma. The saint gave them his blessing to preserve the unity of the Church and to faithfully and truthfully serve God's commandments and the Orthodox Tsar. Subsequently, however, the Black Hundreds did not fulfill even a single one of his requirements. They immediately splintered into a number of small, conflicting groups which were far removed from government interests, but were immoderately fond of demagoguery. The influence of Russian pagans was very great among them, for example the exposed sorcerer Iliodor, who bore the rank of hieromonk, yet threw people into confusion with his anti-government diatribes. In the Duma the Black Hundreds immediately adopted the role of the right opposition to the Tsarist government and did their utmost to hinder the reforms of Stolypin.

St. John could have equally been accused of personally promoting the Ioannite sect that sprang up around him. The fact of the matter was that his astounding miracles had an overwhelming effect on some Russian and Tatar pagans: they proclaimed him to be the Living God and venerated Him accordingly. The Ioannites continuously lay in wait for him and followed him, in order to steal some part of his clothing to serve as a talisman, and one time an especially fanatical sectarian attacked St. John himself, trying to bite off one of his fingers. The saint constantly explained to these sectarians that he performed miracles through the power of the Holy Trinity, while he himself was like all others – a sinful and unworthy person, possessing no merit without the grace of God. But they did not want to believe him and continued in their delusion.

Just as in our present times, during the time of St. John of Kronstadt's service throughout Russia and the world, the Orthodox Church comprised quite a number of clergymen with lukewarm faith. The holy pastor said of such: "The present terrible decline in faith and morals is related to the coldness which many hierarchs and clergymen display towards their flocks." He himself was continuously persecuted and harassed by them during his lifetime. Even Metropolitan Isidore of St. Petersburg himself often did not understand St. John's situation, forbidding him to wear the holy vestments he received as gifts and trying to prohibit St. John from serving within the precincts of other parishes. The rectors of these parishes, being people of little faith, did not believe in the power of God being manifested through the saint, envied his popularity, and by means of slander tried to prevent St. John from serving in their churches.



St. John of Kronstadt

The primary target of St. John's denunciations was the godless intelligentsia. In a 1900 sermon the saint referred to it thus: "More than ever before, heralds of false enlightenment have now appeared in Russia, having grown up on Russian soil; some of our scientists and writers wish to re-educate the youth in their own fashion, not on the basis of true Christianity, but on the basis of false faith and false freethinking; they cloud and defile the minds and hearts of young people with false concepts and worldviews; they create their own laws of life, so-to-speak, they write their own gospel instead of Christ's, and with their lack of morality they completely corrupt the morals of our youth."

The saint throws out a challenge to the growing atheism in Russia and to its apologists, declaring: "There are many who call themselves educators and teach young people that Christ was a mythical personality, that He did not exist at all. I am not a prophet, but I warn you that all of you will be erased from the earth by God's judgment. Beware of the day when Christ, that "mythical personality," will issue a command to his angels in regard to you, as He said in a parable in the Gospel according to Luke: *"But those Mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before Me"* (Luke 19:27).

According to the testimony of Colonel Krylov, in the city of Yaroslavl there lived a certain

prosecutor, a veteran card-player and atheist, who constantly mocked St. John. When the saint served a liturgy in that city, the prosecutor was among those who came up to kiss the cross. However, the clairvoyant St. John did not give the cross to the blasphemer and pushed him aside. Such rejection served to bring the prosecutor to repentance.

In Moscow St. John once served a moleben in a certain home and then offered the cross to those who were present. All came up to kiss the cross except the children's tutor – a student in a local university. Batyushka then said to him: "Are you a pagan, or a Moslem, or a sectarian, that you do not find it necessary to kiss our Lord's cross?" Right away batyushka advised the master of the house to get rid of such a godless tutor, which the master did on-the-spot.

Another time St. John came to a pious family in Moscow, which had a student who was a follower of Voltaire, did not acknowledge God, and mocked the priesthood. Upon his arrival batyushka immediately went up to this student and commanded him to go to confession right away and to take communion. The saint's penetrating glance and unshakeable conviction forced the freethinker to do all that was necessary for his soul. Several days later he died unexpectedly.

In analyzing the reasons for the defeat of the Russian army in the Russo-Japanese war, St. John said: "Nowadays members of the intelligentsia in the Russian army are infected with Western ideas, godlessness, and Tolstoy's teachings, are ashamed to call upon the name of God and to venerate icons of the Lord and the Mother of God, do not believe in God, in His providence, in the invincible might of the Omnipotent Lord Who is strong in battle, and for this reason they suffer defeat after defeat from external and internal enemies – traitors and revolutionaries. Return, Russia, to your holy, pure, salvific, and victorious faith and to your Holy Mother Church, and you shall again be victorious and glorious as in the olden times of faith. Leave off believing in your vainglorious, clouded mind and in the insane counsel of your earthly idol – non-resistance to evil, – and battle with all evil, extinguish it immediately, fight it with your God-given weapons of holy faith, divine wisdom and truth, prayer, righteousness, the cross, courage, loyalty and faithfulness of your sons."

In denouncing the soul-destroying ulcer of Tolstoy's teaching, in a 1902 sermon the holy pastor said: "The adulterous and sinful world has proudly reared its head against the Church in the person of wickedly-philosophizing writers, headed by Count Tolstoy and his fans and adherents, and teaches our baptized people not to believe in Christ's teaching, not to believe in the existence and immortality of the soul, in the resurrection of the dead, in Christ's Dread Judgment, but to live according to one's worldly will – disrespect the holy ties of matrimony, disrespect parents and elders, engage in adultery and drunkenness, lie, steal, murder, and willfully take one's own life."

Condemning parliamentary politicians, St. John cried out in 1907: “Keep silent, you illusionary constitutionalists and parliamentarians! Depart all who oppose God’s will! It is not for you to rule the thrones of earthly kings. Depart, audacious ones, who are incapable of controlling even their own selves, but who argue with each other and do nothing beneficial for Russia.”

In regard to the activity of the National Duma, the saint said in 1906: “We wish to rule our own selves without God, with only our proud reason; this is why we do not have a real, God-pleasing, firm, and rational government, we vacillate here and there, we have no peace, but everywhere only murders, thefts, robberies, arson, everywhere only iniquity, immorality, and insubordination. What will come next? If our godless ones, whom we have among all classes of people, do not humble themselves and do not turn to God in repentance, acknowledging their frailty and uselessness without Him, and that only in Him and with Him lies our might and our well-being, – then we can expect nothing good, but undoubtedly only the worst.”

And here are batyushka’s words concerning the year 1907: “We are not living in peaceful times, but in a time of strife and rebellion, a time of lawlessness and godlessness, a time of arrogant flouting of divine and civil laws, a time of a senseless wandering of minds which have tasted some human wisdom and have become overweening, because, according to the word of God, knowledge makes one vain, while love instructs. It is obvious to everyone that the Russian Kingdom is trembling and tottering and is close to falling. Why has the Russian Kingdom, formerly so great, so mighty, and so glorious, become now so weak, humiliated, agitated? Because it has derailed from its firm and unshakeable foundation – the true faith, since the majority of the intelligentsia has fallen away from God, Who Alone is an unshakeable and eternal power, by Whom both heaven and earth are held in wondrous harmony for so many millennia. Various kingdoms have disappeared from the world arena for their disbelief and lawlessness. And the longer this adulterous and sinful world exists and succeeds in its iniquities, the weaker and frailer it becomes, the more it totters, so that by the end of the world it will become a veritable corpse or cinder.”

And further: “Let us pay attention to our contemporary religious and political condition. Now is a terrible time of disbelief and apostasy, a time of all kinds of soul-shattering iniquities; many people have morally turned into wild beasts or evil spirits. There is nothing holy for them, there is no immortal soul, there is no God, there is no resurrection and retribution, there is no impartial, exact, and strict judgment for all words and deeds, and they therefore say: ravage, kill, burn, steal, violate others, lie, deceive, do not obey superiors, be your own boss – you will not be held accountable for anything. A well-known Russian godless writer (Tolstoy) is especially to blame for the corruption and godlessness of the Russian people, primary the intelligentsia, and generally all ill-intentioned publicists are to blame; their godless writings, scattered all over Russia in

millions of printed pieces of paper, have flooded the Russian land and have pushed the youth off its foundations of religious and civil faith. May the iniquitous, evil, prideful Satan be damned for his conceit in regard to his Creator and for being the first to engender the arrogant idea of feeling equal to God and declaring war on Him and His eternal truth, holiness, infinite wisdom, beauty, and invincible power. This worldwide evil force has agitated the whole of Russia, has created and continues to create in it all kinds of troubles, rebellions, disbelief, blasphemy, insubordination, infamy. Turn to God, O Russia, thou who hast sinned before him more than all the peoples on earth, – turn to Him in tears and repentance, in faith and virtue. Thou hast sinned above all others, for thou hast had and still hast the most priceless treasure – the Orthodox faith with its salvific Church, which thou hast trampled and spit upon in the person of thy vain and arrogant sons and daughters, who believe themselves to be educated, but true education in the image of God is impossible without the Church.”

In his book “The Living Sheaf,” St. John expressed the opinion that the greatest enemies of Orthodoxy were Leo Tolstoy and the Catholics. In regard to Papism he wrote: “The Catholics have come up with a new head of the Church, having humiliated the sole true Head of the Church – Christ. The most damaging thing in Christianity, in this divinely-revealed and celestial religion, is the primacy of man in the Church, for example the Pope, and his imaginary infallibility. It is precisely the dogma of infallibility that contains the greatest error, since the Pope is a sinful man, and it would be a great misfortune for him to imagine himself to be infallible. How many great errors, harmful to men’s souls, have been thought up by the Catholic Papist Church – in dogmas, in customs, in canonical rules, in the service, in the deadening pernicious attitude of Catholics towards the Orthodox, in the blasphemy and slander of the Orthodox Church, in the abuse directed towards the Orthodox Church and Orthodox Christians! And for all of this it is the supposedly infallible Pope who is to blame, together with the doctrine of his Jesuits, full of their spirit of deceit and hypocrisy. The Lord Himself is forever present in His Church; what need is there for a deputy – the Pope? And can a sinful man be the Lord’s deputy? He cannot. There can be a king’s deputy, a patriarch’s deputy, but no one can deputize for the Lord, the eternal King and Head of the Church. The Pope has fettered the spiritual freedom and conscience of Christian Catholics. The Catholics are concerned with the Pope and not with Christ, they battle for the Pope and not for Christ, and their ardor in faith often turns into a passionate, man-hating, frenzied fanaticism, a fanaticism of blood and sword, of bonfires, of intolerance, hypocrisy, deceit, and cunning.”

Of Protestants and heretics in general the holy pastor said: “Without Christ as the Head, the Church is not a church but a self-ruling mob. Such are the Lutherans, the Russian dissenters, the followers of Tolstoy. Human frailty, blindness, human passions have now surfaced in the churches that have fallen away. The Lutherans do not pray for the deceased, nor do the Anglicans. The Protestants have a totally distorted conception of the Church, because they do not possess the grace of lawful clergy, they do not have

the sacraments, except for baptism, and they do not have the most important thing: communion of the Body and Blood of Christ; they do not have the celestial branch – the Heavenly Church, since they do not acknowledge the saints; neither do they have the underworld branch, since they do not recognize departed souls and do not pray for them, believing it to be unnecessary. The Anglicans and the Lutherans do not want to have any icons, nor venerate them! This is also bizarre and absurd. The saints are God's friends, His members in whom He resides. Why are we not to venerate their images? The Lutherans have fallen away from the Church and have remained without its Head, and the Anglicans as well: they have no Church, their union with its Head has been severed, they have no omnipotent aid, while the devil battles with all his might and cunning, and holds everyone in his enticement and perdition. There are many who are being destroyed by godlessness and depravity.”

Concerning St. John's relations with the Jews, it should be noted that he believed the policy of the Russian Tsars in regard to non-baptized Jews, in terms of isolating them from the mass of the Russian people in the Pale of Settlement, to be a very wise decision, since he thought that only such a policy would deliver the Russian people from inevitable subjugation to the Jews, which subsequently did happen in Russia. For this reason batyushka did not give his blessing in 1890 to V. Solovyev's project to expand the rights of the Jews in Russia, which project was later rejected also by the Tsar himself.

Meanwhile, a direct confrontation between St. John and the Jews arose only during the revolution of 1905. St. John's detractors asserted that his activities were directed only towards making money, that all his molebens and blessings were done strictly for pay. Crude slander! He never asked for anything. He took only what was given him, and even that only to pass on to the poor. He was hardly ever at home, and thus his home furnishings were extremely modest, even though more than a million rubles a year passed through his hands. Only Pharisees and hypocrites manage not to have any enemies and be respected by all. Christ and His apostles had many enemies and died from their terrible malice. The righteous one of Kronstadt could not but likewise have enemies.

The great pastor's dirtiest and lowliest enemy was the Jewish press. For three years (1905-1908) it daily mocked the pious pastor, mocked his miracles, his charity, the veneration of his followers. Slanderous stories were made up, feminine veneration of him was vilified, popular ardor towards him was spit upon. St. John courageously spoke out against the revolution, and in his homilies he reminded the authorities of their duty to suppress rebellion. The Russian leadership amazedly learned from him that Apostle Paul himself obligates the use of the sword. The Jews could not forgive St. John for this. Becoming supporters of Leo Tolstoy, who rejected the church and state, the Jews rained down a whole torrent of dirt upon St. John, who had stood up for the defense of the Orthodox Church and the Russian state.

Once, during the bringing out of the Holy Gifts from the altar, a Jewish student approached the saint and hit him in the ear with all his might, as a result of which St. John lost hearing in that ear and spilled the Holy Communion. Later on there was an armed seamen's rebellion in Kronstadt, instigated and fanned by revolutionary Jews. These latter decided to use the event in order to make short work of St. John. However, the saint guessed at their trickery and did not allow himself to be talked into going and persuading the rebels to lay down their arms. After the failure of their plan, the revolutionaries decide to lure St. John into a trap and, taking advantage of his incessant concern for the sick, passed his entourage a message that an ill person was in need of the saint's prayers. The saint had a foreboding that he would be met by enemies en route, and several times he warned his entourage, but they continued to plead with him for the supposedly sick person. The saint was led into a very rich house and was taken to the ailing person in the next room. When St. John went in there, the room was locked from the inside and the noise of a struggle could be heard. Then the women who had accompanied batyushka immediately remembered his foreboding of misfortune, tried to break into the room, and finally had to send for the coachman, who broke down the door. By that time St. John's iniquitous attackers had managed to give him several knife wounds and had almost suffocated him. The coachman delivered St. John from his attackers and took him home. As soon as the saint regained consciousness, he immediately made the witnesses swear a terrible oath not to tell anyone of what had happened until his death, in order to avoid a pogrom.



St. John of Kronstadt

The remaining three-and-a-half years of his life the holy martyr suffered such terrible pain from his wounds that he could not sleep at all. Only the Divine liturgy allowed him to have a couple of hours of relief from the unbearable pain, and so despite his frailty he continued to serve daily until his very death, and when he could no longer walk at all, he lay in the altar and took communion.

Thus during the Divine liturgy on 20 December 1908, at which the saint was present together with all the people who were praying for him, he quietly reposed in the Lord. He was buried in the burial vault of St. John's monastery.

I.K. Surskiy

St. John of Kronstadt as server of the Divine Liturgy

St. John of Kronstadt was a great intercessor for the Russian land. He was renowned for his pious and holy life, for his multitudinous miracles, for his extensive aid to the needy. While engaging in constant prayer, he placed the Divine Liturgy above all else, regarding it as an eternal great miracle, and gave himself up to it entirely. In his "Reflections on the Orthodox Church Services" St. John wrote: "There are people for

whom the Liturgy is everything on earth.” And undoubtedly, when he wrote this, he obviously had himself foremost in mind. It was well-known that from his very first days of priesthood he strived to serve the Divine liturgy as frequently as possible, while in the last 35 years of his life he served it daily, except for those days when he was very sick.

He apparently vividly felt and clearly realized through his personal life’s experience the supreme significance of this great sacrament in his life and work. And in fact, he always said and wrote that all his vigor, his indefatigable energy, his activity, which was beyond the strength of a common mortal and which left him not more than 4 hours out of 24 for sleep and rest, could only be explained by the fact that by the grace of God he daily served the great sacrament and partook of the Holy Mysteries.

In his diaries he often turns in thought and pious feeling to the Divine liturgy and does not even find sufficient words to express its majesty and its fruits for the faithful.

“What is more majestic, moving, life-giving on earth than the commemoration of the liturgy? In it is expressed and realized the greatest sacrament of God’s love for mankind – the union of God and man.”

“Without the sacrament of the Body and Blood, without the liturgy, the greatest deed of our Saviour’s love, wisdom, and omnipotence could have been forgotten, the fruits of His suffering could have been lost; for this reason He has commanded us to commemorate the sacrament of His Body and Blood not only in remembrance of Him, but for the sake of close communion with Him. This sacrament is commemorated all over the world.”

We all love life, but there is no true life within us without the source of life – Jesus Christ. The liturgy is a treasure chest, a source of true life, because within it the Lord Himself, the Master of life, offers Himself as food and drink to those who believe in Him, and in His own words gives life in abundance to His communicants: “Whosoever eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood, hath eternal life” (John 6:54). If the world did not have the Most-holy Body and Blood of the Lord, it would not have its greatest benefit – the benefit of true life.”

“The Divine liturgy is an unceasing and supreme miracle in the grace-filled kingdom of God; it is, so-to-speak, a perpetual sacrifice of the Lamb of God; it is the remembrance of His redemptive suffering, death, resurrection, ascension, and His second coming; it is a perpetually continuing sacrifice on the part of the Son of God to God the Father for us, sinners, that will continue until the end of the world. ‘Thine own of Thine own we offer to Thee, in behalf of all, and for all’: for the Lord suffered for all of us, and died, and arose, and thus reminds and will remind all generations of mankind of His sacrifice, and will offer it to all sincere faithful and all seeking salvation as food and drink for sanctification and regeneration until the end of time, in order for all the faithful to be saved.”

“The idea of the liturgy is for all to be one in Christ. During the proskomedia and the liturgy all the saints, beginning with the Mother of God, are summoned to participate in the service together with the priest. Just think of the closeness to each other of all the celestial denizens, and earth dwellers, and the Mother of God, and all the saints, and all of us, Orthodox Christians, during the commemoration of the Divine, universal, all-encompassing liturgy!”

St. John’s words and attitudes never differed from his deeds and his life. As he understood the liturgy, so did he teach it, so did he serve it, serving it extraordinarily, living each word of the prayers, giving himself up completely to the remembrance of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is “both the One Who offers and the One Who is offered, both the sacrifice and the high priest” in the liturgy.

Watching him serve the liturgy both in Kronstadt and in the various churches of St. Petersburg, one could not but see that he served each liturgy as though it were the very first liturgy in his life. He lived spiritually from liturgy to liturgy. Everything else was secondary for him and did not engage and fill his soul as did the liturgy.

Being incredibly kind and sociable, he never refused to share a meal after the liturgy with his co-servers and parishioners. There he is, after having spoken separately with various individuals especially needing his comfort and help, quickly entering the room where the meal is being served, affectionately greeting all those present, and then invariably beginning to talk about the Church, about the temple, about the service. The idea of the union of all faithful in Christ continues to rule his actions, and he shares food and drink with those sitting near him. But St. John never stays until the end of the meal, since here he has already provided comfort, warmth, and illumination with his inner light, and now he must hasten to others, especially to the sick, the elderly, and the frail, who cannot come to him themselves, but who hunger for his presence.

It is extremely hard to describe how St. John served the Divine liturgy. He was an ardent flame before God; he represented the complete union of a pure image of God with its Original. During the liturgy the entire Heavenly Church – prophets, apostles, martyrs, hierarchs, venerables, and all celestial denizens were like close living friends to St. John. His praying was also unusual. He would suddenly completely forego making the sign of the cross and only bowed deeply or raised his eyes to heaven, or he would stand on his knees for a long time without moving.



□

St. John of Kronstadt

He read the prayers as though he saw the Saviour, or the Mother of God, or the saints right in front of him, and he either prostrated himself in great humility before them, or spoke boldly, as if demanding the fulfillment of his entreaties. Sometimes St. John used special movements that accorded with his inner emotions. Thus, during the hymn about the Son of God's incarnation, he would pick up the holy cross from the altar table and kiss it several times with tenderness and sometimes with tears. After the transubstantiation of the Holy Gifts he sometimes bowed deeply over the diskos with the Holy Body or the sacred chalice with the Blood of the Saviour, kissed the edge of the sacred vessels, and tears of tenderness streamed abundantly down his face. It was impossible not to notice that immediately after partaking of the Holy Mysteries, St. John's face became illuminated, shone with joy, his usual fatigue and tiredness disappeared, and he became "young" and energetic.

It should be said that the priests and the faithful greatly valued prayerful contact with St. John during the liturgy. He was constantly invited to serve at feasts and church celebrations. While he was still alive, a church feast felt incomplete without him, and thus he not only served in all the churches of Kronstadt and almost all of St. Petersburg, but also in many churches of Moscow and practically all the major cities of Russia. Wherever he served, many priests and deacons would always gather there; wherever

he went, there were always myriads of believers, those people upon whom faith rests in this sinful world, and even the world itself stands only because of such people. Wherever he went, there was always a triumph of love and brotherhood, there was always a feast of faith. The importance of St. John in this regard is immense. Being continuously surrounded by a host of clergymen while serving the liturgy, he was always a teacher to them in this most important aspect of their service. In this case he was truly a pastor of pastors!

St. John of Kronstadt and Russia's Spiritual Crisis

Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided within itself falleth (Luke 11:17).

Never before has so much been said or written about any of the saints or venerables as there has been of St. John of Kronstadt. Our aim, therefore, will not be so much to present a complete picture of him, who is so well-known to us, as to characterize his era and clarify the historical significance of St. John.

St. John lived at a time when the spiritual crisis being undergone by Russia was reaching its apogee: a fatal dichotomy reigned in all spheres of our nation's life. On one hand there was a great spiritual revival of asceticism, which began in the 19th century and embraced all religious Russian people, and which was now producing its rich harvest; on the other hand, the overwhelming majority of society was in the grip of an opposing movement, alien to us and coming from the West, of atheistic and revolutionary influences.

St. John emerged from the sphere of spiritual revival, he was completely enveloped by its spirit and its light, and the wave of this renaissance lifted St. John high onto the top of its crest. The Lord placed His flaming candle high upon the candlestand. Another wave, that of godlessness and destruction, the wave of the spirit of the Antichrist, lifted to its crest Leo Tolstoy, who became its universally acknowledged prophet. St. John stood up sternly and imperiously against the enemies of the church and state, continuously accusing them, summoning them to repentance, threatening them with God's punishment. In this lay his prophetic calling and service.

I.

ST. JOHN IN THE SPIRIT AND POWER OF ANCIENT HOLY FATHERS

Road to holiness

After the reforms of Peter the Great and subsequent ones, which were all aimed against monasticism, Russian monasticism suffered an era of decline, but with the coming of the 19th century the outlines of a spiritual renaissance could already be seen.

The foundation of this revival was laid by Archimandrite Paisius Velichkovsky: from the second half of the 18th century he engaged in translating the writings of the Holy Fathers (Philokalia) from Greek into Slavonic and revived ancient Eastern asceticism in his monastery in Moldavia. In this asceticism the center of gravity lies not in external labors, but in inner endeavor, specifically in attaining impassivity. The end purpose of all these endeavors becomes a direct meeting with God – the “acquisition of the Holy Spirit.” In this regard, the guidance of elders in spiritual endeavor was also revived. The renaissance of monasticism in Russia is also linked with the name of Metropolitan Gabriel of St. Petersburg, who published the “Philokalia” in 1793 and, moreover, appointed disciples of Paisius as abbots of many Russian monasteries, who subsequently revived ancient traditions in monastic endeavor that were almost forgotten in our land.

A multitude of holy ascetics appeared in this age of renaissance. In the early period we see that greatest of saints – St. Seraphim of Sarov (1759-1833). “Saint Seraphim’s gift of holiness,” – says a church historian, – “like all gifts coming from above, issues from the Father of Lights, while the saint’s personal achievements come from his heroic endeavor. His spiritual philosophy arose from the same life-giving river of Russian ascetic revival, along which the saint led the boat of his life.”

Father John Sergiyev was born in 1829, not long before the repose of St. Seraphim and, similarly to the latter, wished to lead the boat of his life along the same shining currents of spiritual renaissance.

We do not know which religious individuals were close to St. John during his study at the Academy, nor who was his spiritual father, but we may assertively state that there was no dearth of experienced ascetic guides in those times. Moreover, one book of ascetic writings after another began to appear in print. Those times were the heyday of spiritual revival.

By that time the disciples of elder Paisius’ disciples became concentrated primarily at the Optina Hermitage, which became a spiritual center and was renowned for its clairvoyant elders and its propagation of spiritual writings. Beginning in 1847, a group of professors and writers, headed by Elder Macarius, translated and published patristic writings. Their activity coincided with St. John’s academic years (1851-1855) and the first years of his priesthood.

At the same time, the future hierarch Ignaty Bryanchaninov (1807-1867) served as abbot of the Sergius Hermitage near St. Petersburg, which he had founded. He represented an attractive and charming image of a true ascetic. St. Ignaty was a disciple of Elder Leo of Optina and the author of “Ascetic Efforts,” in which he described the path of inner endeavor on the basis of the teaching of the Holy Fathers and warned

against falling into delusion. St. John was known to have ties with the Sergius Hermitage in his young years, and these ties continued into later life.

Another prominent contemporary of St. John was Bishop Theophanus the Recluse (1811-1984), who worked for almost twenty years on the Russian translation of the “Philokalia” and through his writings and letters provided guidance to the religious segment of his contemporary generation.

Although St. John was a lay priest and did not have monastic tonsure, his inner life consisted entirely of monastic endeavor in accordance with patristic tradition. He constantly spoke of inner spiritual endeavor, of “invisible warfare” – not only against passions, but also against the spiritual host of wickedness in the heavenly places, and spoke of the prayer of the heart and of the power and efficacy of the name of Jesus. He spoke in detail of his spiritual endeavor on December 12, 1900 in his homily for the 45th anniversary of his ordination into priesthood. Here he touched upon his first steps along the way of spiritual warfare, although self-testing, self-realization, and constant prayer were his life’s work until the very end. Deepest humility was his shield and his visor: “In body I am dust and ashes, while my soul lives and rests only in God. He is both the light of my thoughts and the strength of my heart, while by myself I am nothing.”

Here is what St. John says of himself in the above-mentioned “Homily”: “After being ordained a priest and pastor, I soon learned from personal experience with whom I was entering into combat in my spiritual field of endeavor – specifically, with the strong, cunning, indefatigable prince of this world, who breathed evil, destruction and the hellish flames of Gehenna, and the spiritual host of wickedness in the heavenly places... This combat with a strong and cunning invisible enemy clearly showed me how many frailties, weaknesses, and sinful passions there were in me, how much the prince of this world had in me, and how strongly I must battle with myself, with my sinful inclinations and habits, and conquer them, in order to be as invincible as possible from the adversary’s arrows.

There began a spiritual combat, self-monitoring, the sharpening of spiritual vision, self-instruction on **continuous inner prayer** and the calling upon of the all-saving **name of Christ**; like the psalm-writer, King David, I began to constantly lift my spiritual eyes unto the hills – to heaven, from whence came obvious and immediate sovereign help (Psalm 121:1-3), and my mighty enemies were routed, while I received freedom and inner tranquility...

This warfare continues within me to this day; and the long duration of the spiritual warfare taught me much, especially the experienced perception of all intricacies of spiritual warfare, of all the numerous snares of the unseen enemies, and the firm and always assured calling upon the **name of Jesus Christ**, before which they are unable

to stand; in this unseen warfare I came to know the constant nearness of the Lord to me, His immeasurable bounty, His quickness to hear me, the infinite holiness of His nature, for which even a single unrighteous thought is abhorrent, even an instantaneous desire for sin or pleasure in sin, since God's holiness seeks and absolutely demands from all of us holiness in thoughts, holy zeal in feelings, holiness in all the movements of our will, in all words, in all deeds.

In this warfare I came to know the incredible depth of God's longsuffering towards us, for He alone knows the entire frailty of our fallen nature, which He mercifully took upon Himself, except for sin, and He therefore commanded us to forgive the sins of others "sevenfold seventy times"; and He surrounded and continues to daily surround me with the joy of deliverance from sin and with inner tranquility. The mercy of God which I have experienced and the Lord's customary nearness to me assures me of hope in my eternal salvation, and of all those who listen to me and follow my guidance towards salvation."

St. John then speaks of how, while serving the wondrous services and communing daily of the most-holy and life-giving sacrament, he felt within himself "its life-giving nature for the soul and body, its victory over sin and death, and the feelings of redemption, peace, liberation, and fervor of the spirit which it engendered."



St. John of Kronstadt

Thus by means of inner endeavor and a daily serving of the Liturgy, St. John ascended from power to power, attained and was granted greater and greater gifts of the Holy Spirit. And all these gifts were abundantly poured upon St. John and testify to his holiness, his widely-known clairvoyance, miracle-working, and the countless healings he performed.

II. PROPHETIC SERVICE

How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not (Matt. 23:37).

The 19th and early 20th centuries were a flourishing not only of monastic endeavor: this was an era of renaissance in all spheres of the nation's life. In church art, after a period of decadence, one could observe a return to beautiful ancient images. The higher theological academies were becoming liberated from the alien influences of other religions and were stepping onto their own inherent path. An independent school of theology was being created.

Due to a continuous reign of Orthodox emperors, the canonical service of the monarch as loyal son of the Church and guardian of Orthodoxy was being reinstated. The anticanonical synodal structure was doomed, and things were progressing towards the restoration of the patriarchy.

An upsurge was felt in everything. Russia was taking great strides towards the flourishing of its culture, towards the pinnacle of its well-being, might, and glory. But on a par with the creative and constructive forces, the centrifugal forces of destruction were developing even more rapidly.

The overwhelming majority of Russian society was infected with the corrupting, godless, revolutionary spirit that came to us from the West and was depicted with great genius in Dostoyevsky's "Demons." Moral decay was quickly spreading along with godlessness. Even some of the members of the destructive camp were aware at times of the impasse reached by the leftist intelligentsia and into which it was leading the whole of Russia.

In a paper read by him in December of 1908, Russian poet Alexander Blok speaks of it with great force and clarity. He perceives the intelligentsia's doom: "It is condemned to wander, move, and degenerate in a vicious circle. Without a superior guiding principle, revolt and violence are inevitable, beginning with the decadents' vulgar theomachy and ending with open self-destruction – all kinds of debauchery, drunkenness, and suicide." Blok saw the dead-end to which the intelligentsia had come, to which it had led Russia,

but there was no repentance in him: he immediately joined the Bolsheviks.

A vivid description of what was happening in Russia was provided in 1901 in the magazine "The Helmsman" by St. John's great contemporary – Archbishop Ambrose of Kharkov. "What can one say about our so-called light literature, – says the elderly archpastor, – that is so assiduously being spread among the people? It is a conduit for inane and untalented works that corrupt the people's taste and distract them from serious spiritual reading.

And what is the state of our educated society, which loves to judge so freely and with such self-assurance about all current events and manifestations? It is a market where all kinds of liberal ideas and judgments are offered and exchanged.

Numerous and severe reproofs will rain down upon me, of course, and accusation of offending high society and the most educated classes of our social system. But someone must open the eyes of these carefree and blinded people, who are rushing towards perdition and dragging an entire great nation after them!

I am an old man, over 80 years old, I am already living through a fifth reign, and I consider it a sin to die without telling my Fatherland the bitter truth. I saw with my own eyes the reforms of the last century, both favorable and unsuccessful, in the spheres of education, state and social institutions; I saw the quick change in social mores and was amazed that our thinkers do not notice the fall of our people from the firm mental and moral height upon which stood our ancestors, do not see how our spiritual resources are being dissipated, how the purity and stability of our family life and the simplicity and modesty of our customs are being lost.

Let me be reproved for my harsh speech. My words are justified by current events and inarguable facts: our higher classes and progressive estates are being permeated by a spirit of disbelief and rejection of Christ's teaching. They are becoming lost to the Church and are tearing themselves away from the millions of Orthodox people of whom they are supposed to be the leaders. Their disbelief and liberalism are infecting the semi-educated officials, merchants, scribes."

The archbishop then goes on to vividly describe the moral disintegration which with catastrophic speed was overwhelming the common people more and more, and the helplessness of the naive measures that were being undertaken to oppose this evil. "A sad picture," – he says, and then continues:

"Have you ever seen what remains of luxurious fields of ripe wheat after a cloud of hail passes over them? – you see only naked straws and sheaves in the ground... Have you ever read of what remains in abundant fields after an enemy army passes over them, or

they become the seat of battle? Only the bitter wailing of the landowners can testify to the force of the disaster that struck them...

Such is the danger that threatens our Church and our great people!”

The imminent destruction and its causes were also seen by St. John's older contemporary, holy Bishop Theophanus the Recluse (1815-1894), already in the late 19th century, when he said: “They have become mired in Western dirt up to their ears, and yet they think: everything is all right!.. Within a generation or two our Orthodoxy will dry up... Orthodoxy, sovereign monarchy, nationality – that is what we must preserve! If ever these principles change, the Russian people will cease to be Russian. They will then lose their sacred tricolor standard.” With his sermons and letters Bishop Theophanus continuously fought against the putrid spirit of godlessness and revolution. Earlier our great ascetics and saints, such as the venerable Seraphim of Sarov, the ascetic of the Glinsky Hermitage Father Ilidor, who had had the famous vision about Russia's forthcoming destinies, as well as the Optina elders and others warned of God's punishment that was coming upon Russia for its abandonment of God. This was also foreseen and talked about by our great writers and thinkers, such as Dostoyevsky, Leontyev, who clearly indicated the causes of the collapse, and even before that warnings were issued by Kireyevsky.

There were many among St. John's contemporaries who saw and spoke of the collapse and fought against it, but St. John's denunciatory and prophetic voice rang louder than all others. He personally bore on his shoulders the entire burden of prophetic service.

In the days of the revolution of 1905, St. John was subjected to an extraordinary outpouring of hate and malice when he sharply and openly stood up against it and thus diverged from progressive society. The situation even came to insults and physical attacks, so that St. John was in constant danger. A society for the protection of St. John was organized under the chairmanship of Metropolitan Macarius of Moscow. In his time, a whole galaxy of “progressive” writers ridiculed the Church and the government, trying to outdo one another in blasphemy and mockery. But Leo Tolstoy surpassed them all.

St. John addressed the following words to them: “Here are modern insolent abusers – Tolstoy and all his adherents and followers, true antichrists, liars according to Apostle John: ‘Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son’ (1 John 2:22)... Does Tolstoy believe in the Son? He does not! What follows then? ‘It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the Living God’ (Heb. 10:31). Let us all believe until the end of our lives and let us hold firmly unto our confession.”

In "The Helmsman" for the year 1901 we find the following words: "If we disregard all of Tolstoy's other works and only look at the two chapters in his novel "The Resurrection" that describe a liturgy in a prison church, even this will be enough to become horrified at the Count's malicious mockery of the greatest Orthodox sacrament – the holy Eucharist. And just think of all his blasphemy against our miracle-working icons! Before such blasphemy against Christ and His Church, the mockery of the Lord at His trial and especially on Golgotha by the Jews who had crucified Him truly fades into insignificance. The latter denied Christ's divinity only conditionally."

Professor Speransky wrote in the newspaper "The Russian Thought" of the fact that Tolstoy represented an unparalleled situation of a government within a government, that around him was circumscribed a circle of absolute immunity. And Suvorin justly remarks in his diary: "There are two tsars in Russia – Nicholas the Second and Leo Tolstoy. Which one is stronger? Nicholas the Second cannot do anything to Tolstoy, while Tolstoy continuously undermines the throne of Nicholas the Second." Tolstoy himself confirms it: "I did all that I could to achieve this goal (land in prison). Perhaps if I had taken part in a murder I would have achieved it, but as it is, I called their tsar a most hideous creature, a brazen murderer, all their divine and state laws – the vilest lies, all their ministers and general – poor slaves and hired killers: and despite all of this I still go free!"

St. John replies to him on behalf of the Lord: ... "You are trampling abominably upon the New Testament blood that I shed in suffering on the Cross for the entire world, you are trampling upon My gifts like swine." But God is not to be mocked. In His righteous anger He will scorn your foolishness, your stupidity, your malice, hate, and pride, and He will scatter you like dust in the wind" ... "You will die in your sins if you do not believe in Me," – said the Lord to the Pharisees. Woe unto Leo Tolstoy, who does not believe in the Lord and is dying in the sin of unbelief and blasphemy. 'Terrible is the death of sinners' (Psalm 33:22). And the death of Tolstoy will be a fearful lesson to the entire world. His family members will of course try to conceal this."

St. John entreated the Russian people: "Learn, O Russia, to believe in the Almighty God Who rules over the world's destinies, and learn from thy holy ancestors to stand strong in faith, wisdom, and courage. The Lord has entrusted us, Russians, with the great and salvific gift of the Orthodox faith... Arise, ye Russians!... Who has taught you insubordination and senseless revolts, which never existed in Russia before?... Cease your madness! It is enough! It is time for both you and Russia to stop drinking from the chalice full of poison!"

"O righteous God! Both the pastors and the flock are mute before Thee. 'They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no, not one' (Psalm 14:3). What will finally happen under the disorder that now exists in our life?"

Lawlessness is spreading all over the earth; the kingdom of the enemy is spreading and Thy kingdom is growing smaller; there are few of Thy chosen ones left, in whose hearts Thou rests; there are many more slaves of the devil, in whose hearts is enthroned the man-killer of yore, sitting there like a thief. What wilt Thou do with us, Lord? The blood of Thy Testament is crying out from the earth, but the voice of Thy Gospel is not penetrating the hearts of Christians. Thy commandments are being disregarded, church canons are being violated, – what wilt Thou do with us, Lord?”

In 1907, during a quiet period in Russia, seeing the universal lack of sensitivity and repentance, and foreseeing with his prophetic gaze the forthcoming incredible suffering of the Russian people, St. John, though burdened with heavy illnesses and being on the edge of the grave himself, ceaselessly thundered out his prophecies, and with a feeling of ardent pity no longer spoke but cried out, raising his hands upward: “Repent! A time is coming that is horrible beyond imagination!” “The impression was overwhelming, all those present were overcome with dread, and crying could be heard all over the church. All of us, – said an eyewitness afterwards, – were perplexed: what would it be? War? An earthquake? A flood? However, from the prophet’s words we understood that it would be something much more horrible, and we surmised that the earth’s axis would turn over.”

“The people of the first antediluvian world, – said St. John, – were given 120 years to repent, and they were warned that for their sins there would be a punishment from God – the flood. Time passed, but the people became more depraved and did not think of repentance, nor did they believe the prophet of repentance, the righteous Noah, – and God’s words came to pass exactly. The Jews did not believe their prophets who told them that they would be taken into captivity by the Babylonian king and continued to worship idols, – and so they went into captivity, and Jerusalem was razed, and all their wealth was taken over by the Babylonians. The Jews who were Christ’s contemporaries did not believe in Christ as Messiah and crucified Him, and Christ’s prophecy concerning Jerusalem soon came to pass, and the Romans destroyed the Jews mercilessly.

And now in our present times the people have also gone mad, they do not listen to the call of the Church, they say – these are all fairy tales, the priests are deceiving us for the sake of income.



St. John of Kronstadt

O ye blind and hardhearted ones, are not the events foretold by the Gospel coming to pass now in front of your very eyes? Here is the destructive war, the famine, the plagues. Do you not believe in God's justice even now? But know ye that judgment is at hand, and that the Lord is coming soon in His glory to judge the living and the dead!" Just as in ancient times the Lord sent prophets to urge the people to repent, so it was that during the time of the Russian people's abandonment of God, a great prophet was sent to them to confirm by countless miracles and instances of clairvoyance his forecast of God's forthcoming chastisement.

But the Russian people did not heed the prophet's appeal, and thereby they were inevitably doomed.

The path to Russia's renaissance, as well as to the personal salvation of each one of us has been clearly indicated by St. John, and this path – the path of universal repentance – is the only one; there is none other.

St. John of Kronstadt's prophecies about Russia



St. John of Kronstadt

In the century following the repose of the memorable pastor, St. John of Kronstadt, his glory shines like a resplendent sun. New and new rays of this sun shine upon us in the form of accounts of his countless miracles. The memory of his name evokes the bottomless sea of divine grace, of which he was the carrier.

What can be more glorious or richer than the gift of miracle-working? When people have tried out all the natural resources, when there is no longer any hope of human assistance, then in great despair the soul cries out to God's saint and by his word receives healing.

To what can this gift be compared? If one compares it to something in this world, then

one may say that it unites wealth, and power, and wisdom, and yet at the same time the gift of miracle-working surpasses them all. Who is richer than the one who has the gift of miracle-working, and of what significance are worldly riches in comparison? Whose power is greater than the one who has this divine gift? Which king or dictator can compare to the one who commands the laws of nature? Whose worldly wisdom can compare to the one who bears divine wisdom within himself?

And such a superhuman lived in our homeland, among the Russian people, and was our elder contemporary. It is primarily for this great and splendid gift of miracle-working that the Russian people venerate St. John of Kronstadt.

However, the glory of St. John is by no means dependent on this one gift of miracle-working. There is another and no less important side to his activity – his **gift of prophecy**.

It may – alas! – sound paradoxical, but the state of our humiliated and suffering homeland for the last century confirms the glory of St. John, who sternly prophesied the coming of these sufferings, but remained “a cry in the wilderness.”

He was a loyal son of his homeland, he loved his dear Russia as few others did, loved all the boundless beauty of Russian life, but above all he loved God’s Church and the Holy Trinity, in Whose grace-filled rays he lived. He prophesied God’s forthcoming punishment of Russia for its falling away from the Holy Church in the person of its ruling circles, mainly the intelligentsia.

“God is not to be mocked, – said St. John. – I look upon Russia and I become filled with dread and sorrow, seeing how it is suffering and how it will yet suffer, if it does not return wholeheartedly to its native faith, to the Orthodox Church.”

“Russia, – he said at another time, – is agitated and suffering from a bloody internal battle, from a bad harvest and famine, from a great increase in the cost of living, from godlessness, from an absolute loss of morals. These are evil times – people have turned into ferocious beasts, even into evil spirits. The government has become weak. It wrongly understood the freedom that it gave to the people. It itself has become obscured in mind and did not provide the people with a clear understanding of freedom. Evil has grown in Russia to monstrous proportions, and it is almost impossible to correct it.”

This was said by St. John in the period of 1904-1908, and at the same time he explained how it had all occurred.

“The morals of all classes of Russian society have nowadays become tremendously

weak. Daily life has become putrefied with all kinds of sins – abandonment of faith, ignorance of God, and sacrilege, especially among the educated elite, have become widespread and commonplace, depravity has become a daily custom, the press and literature are permeated with enticement. All have betrayed or are betraying God in one way or another, all have abandoned the Lord, and His righteous wrath has been ignited. Universal disasters are overwhelming us for the heavy sins and iniquities of the entire people.”

In such a spirit the great pastor denounced the universal vices of Russia, but his voice was muffled by the so-called progressive and falsely liberal press, which unanimously abused him as an extreme reactionary, a retrograde, a man behind the times in that enlightened 20th century.

St. John, however, had a clear understanding of where all this came from in the Russian land.

“Our current overeducated members of the intelligentsia, who have alienated themselves from their Mother Church, shun God’s wondrous design for our salvation and all the sacred images of God’s deeds and all His saints, yet they are madly interested in decadent art and sculpture. There are those who throw away enormous sums of money on these voluptuous images, yet look upon the poor with squeamishness and disgust, not wishing to spare them even a few kopeks.”

“How trite people have become and how depraved, completely losing the Christian spirit and becoming like pagans and sometimes even worse in their way of life. It is the unbridled press, especially the underground one, that has brought our intelligentsia and partly the common people to such a state of immorality. For a long time it had coveted freedom and has finally grabbed it. In one way or another this scythe will reap us all. The Dread Judgment awaits mankind.”

In his ardent love for Russia St. John pointed out that the foundation on which Russia stands is the Orthodox monarchy.

“What would you be without a Tsar, O Russians? Your enemies would try to destroy even the very name of Russia, for the guardian and protector of Russia after God is Russia’s Sovereign, the Royal Tsar, and without him Russia is not Russia.”

What an amazing prophecy! As though the great pastor foresaw those four ominous letters – USSR.

St. John continuously coupled the rule of the Orthodoxy monarchy with Divine Providence. “Only God can empower a chosen individual to occupy the throne and entrust him with monarchical power, vesting him in glory, majesty, and strength.”

St. John also denounced those statesmen who were destroying Russia. “Our current

restless and unacknowledged politicians desire a constitutional or republican form of rule in Russia, but they do not understand the history and character of the Russian people, who cannot be without a Tsar, who live only by him, and who, after God and the Heavenly Queen, place their hopes in him alone. Thus let us venerate the Tsar as a ruler given by God for the good of Russia.”

Though denouncing his beloved Russia, St. John still believed in its shining future. “Russia is being tempered by woes and disasters. Stand firm, Russia! Repent and pray. Shed bitter tears before thy Heavenly Father, Whom thou hast offended immeasurably. The Lord, like an artful physician, subjects us to various temptations, sorrows, illnesses, and woes, in order to purify us like gold in a furnace. Such is the purpose of all the trials and miseries sent to us by God in this life.”

All the prophecies of St. John of Kronstadt have come to pass in full force. In truth, he was not only a great miracle-worker, but also a great prophet. We should venerate the resplendent glory of this great miracle-worker and prophet, and entreat him to pray for a great miracle for his ardently-loved homeland – the miracle of the resurrection of Russia.

O great pastor! Hear thou our prayers, if not for the sake of us, sinners, then for the fulfillment of thy prophecy on the purification of the gold of the Russian soul in the furnace of fiery tribulations, for the glory of thy name and for the glory of God in Holy Russia.

Bishop Nikon

The undimmed light

*From everywhere the people flowed
To Kronstadt, where the Pastor lived.
The lame, the sick, the blind were healed,
When ardently for them he prayed.*

*“Great tribulation threatens Russia,”
He sternly prophesied to all,
“And only prayer and repentance
Can save our homeland,” he foretold.*

(V.B. Agneyev

Translated by Natalia Sheniloff)

The righteous Saint John of Kronstadt, the teacher of faith and guiding light of Orthodoxy who was venerated by the entire Christian world, reposed in the Lord on

December 20, 1908 by the old calendar (January 2, 1909 by the new calendar). Eight years later our homeland was visited by a great misfortune: there came upon us the sad days of the vile “February” (revolution).

When hearing the name “Father John,” I vividly remember my childhood years. Until 1880 my parents lived in their home in Kronstadt. The windows of our house faced Cathedral Square, and up to the age of ten I always saw before me the beautiful and majestic St. Andrew’s Cathedral which stood in the middle of the square. In the 70s and 80s the rector of the cathedral was Protopriest Paul Trachevsky. The assistant pastor was Protopriest John Sergiyev.

The residents of Kronstadt, which may be considered a suburb of St. Petersburg, were used to seeing the clergy of their churches follow the customs of the capital as concerned fashion and cut of clothing, for the priests there paraded around in cassocks made of expensive materials.



St. John of Kronstadt

When Father John Sergiyev, the humble son of a church reader from the Sura village in the province of Archangelsk, unused to the luxury of the capital, arrived as priest at our cathedral, many of the parishioners expressed their disappointment. “Well, well,” they said, “what a priest has been sent to us... No looks at all.”

In those years Kronstadt was a commercial port, a harbor for St. Petersburg. Foreign ships and sailboats transferred their cargoes to barges in the Kronstadt harbor. Thousands of dockers made up the work force. This was a totally unique element, consisting of vagrants by profession, typical “proletariats according to the theory of Karl Marx.” Naturally these kind of people regularly spent on drink all they earned during the summer days. But when winter came along, the wharves became covered with ice and the harbor became empty. Then the dockers – dirty, ragged, and often barefooted – were to be found on the city streets with their hands held out.

St. John, having finished a private service somewhere, is returning home with a cabby. From all street corners tens of such “proletariats” run towards him. St. John leaves the cabby and first gives this crowd some moral instruction. Taking off their caps, they patiently listen to him. Afterward batyushka takes out his purse and tries to see whether there is anything left in it from the previous street handout. The purse becomes completely emptied out.

St. John realized, of course, that such aid to the poor was only a palliative measure. This gave rise to his project of building a “House of Industry.” My father was one of the primary people who helped St. John accomplish his plan. The “House of Industry” was to serve as a soup kitchen for the hungry and a place to spend the night. In the work hall of this home, all who so desired could do some simple work and receive pocket money. The home had a church in which St. John served.

Batyushka was an old friend of my parents’ and often visited our home. He was dearly loved and greatly respected, and everyone knew that he led a holy and ascetic way of life. But to my parents he seemed in all respects to be an ordinary man. One could converse with him about all the affairs that were currently of interest to society. And suddenly everyone began reading in the newspapers about miraculous cases of healing by his prayer. Judging by the suddenness of the miraculous change which St. John’s life underwent, it is quite obvious that it occurred by God’s Providence. St. John’s life as a common man ended; his “saint’s life” began. He no longer belonged to himself. He became the executor of the supreme will of God.

My younger brother entered the Naval Corps in 1888. Father wished St. John to bless him for service in his new field of endeavor. He took his son and reached batyushka with great difficulty. St. John blessed the young man and said: “May the Lord preserve you, son Andrew, both on the water and under the water.” Upon his return home, father expressed his surprise to his wife in regard to batyushka’s words: “What does it mean – under the water? Do you suppose he’ll be drowning?”

Let me remind you that this was all in 1888, i.e. 10 years before the appearance of

newspaper reports on submarine trials. St. John's words were later forgotten, and my brother remembered the prophecy only 20 years later, when he became the commander of a submarine.

While a cadet in the corps, my brother came down with an acute form of typhus. His parents were summoned, because the doctors said there was no hope for him. Mother sat at his bedside day and night, since he had already lost consciousness and was dying. Father was able to get to St. John and tell him of his woe.

St. John, who at that time was renowned as a healer, chose a moment and came to the corps' hospital, where he had never been before. There was no one in his entourage who knew the layout of the corps buildings. But St. John, without asking anyone, drove up to a side gate that was unknown even to us, old cadets, and quickly striding through the labyrinth of courtyards, went into the hospital directly to the ward where my brother lay. Greeting my mother, he then loudly said to my brother: "Son Andrew, let us pray together. Repeat the words of the prayer after me..." And suddenly my sick brother, who was lying unconscious and had already lost the gift of speech, began saying: "In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit." In a faint but clear voice he repeated after batyushka the words of the prayer. His voice continued to become stronger and clearer...

The prayers were read and batyushka, bidding my mother farewell, briefly said to her: "He will get well." St. John's very appearance at my brother's bedside was a miracle. So was his cure a miracle.

Afterwards my brother sailed on submarines, participated in a campaign with the squadron of Admiral Rozhdestvensky, and took part in the battle with the mighty German squadron in the Gulf of Riga, where he commanded the destroyer "Emir Bukharsky." He also took part in the White Movement. Many times he saw death around him, but the Lord preserved him. He died in America in 1944 at the age of 70.

St. John has left us physically, but he has never left us without his help. The Undimmed Light with which he illuminated the hearts of the Orthodox faithful will never fade, and St. John himself will always come to our aid.

*The Holy Spirit's God-sent grace
In him was clearly manifest;
He had the gift with ardent words
To illumine the people's hearts.
We have been told that he reposed,
In long succession years went by,
But his undimmed light remains
Forever in believers' hearts.*

D.V. Nikitin

Translated by Natalia Sheniloff

Memoirs of a Kronstadt resident



St. John of Kronstadt

St. John of Kronstadt's very appearance, especially in priestly garb, was enough to produce spiritual delight in the faithful, fortifying their faith in the Lord. His blue eyes, shining with love and prayerful inspiration, gave the impression that he saw Jesus Christ before him. This impression was strengthened by his moving and heartfelt exclamations and prayers, expressed as a petitionary conversation with the Lord Who was visible to him. The faithful were also struck by his lack of gray hair, very unusual for his 60-65 years of age, and especially by his extraordinary gait, which made it seem as though he were flying over the floor of the altar or the ambo, carried by the heavenly powers.

During the church services performed by St. John, the spacious St. Andrew's Cathedral of which St. John was the rector was always full to the utmost. St. John's powerful influence over the faithful was especially felt during general confession, which he was forced to use in view of the enormous number of people wishing to confess to him.

One can say with absolute assurance that there was not a single soul in the overcrowded church that did not wholeheartedly repent of its sins, naming them with loud weeping and wailing.

In order to be able to continuously entreat the Lord for others, St. John welcomed all the faithful who came to see him from all corners of Russia in his House of Industry, where special rooms were assigned for this purpose and were let out at minimum cost. Passing through these rooms, St. John served molebens for the visitors, miraculously healing their physical and spiritual illnesses, instructing and fortifying them in the Orthodox faith, and providing magnanimous material aid to the needy. In view of St. John's clairvoyance, those who came to these rooms with fraudulent claims, trying only to get money out of him, were totally unsuccessful. There were times when St. John, coming into a room and just glancing at an unknown visitor, would sternly say: "You are unworthy. Repent and cleanse yourself of your great sin through prayer and fasting, and then come back."

The writer of these lines personally experienced St. John's clairvoyance, when he was taken by his father to get Batyushka's blessing: "Bless him, Batyushka, for he is going off to apply to the Cadet Corps." Placing his hand on my head and half-closing his eyes, St. John confidently said: "You will pass." – After that, as though seeing with his spiritual eyes the mortal danger that awaited me in the distant future, he added in an agitated voice: "Quickly make the sign of the cross."

Sixteen years passed after that blessing, and the time came when during our "bloodless revolution" I was placed against the wall to be executed together with other officers. Unexpectedly for my own self, the command "Aim!" was interrupted by my semi-conscious but commanding voice: "Wait! Let me cross myself!" The several seconds that were spent in making the sign of the cross saved me from the terrible fate of the other officers, for in the meantime my soldiers hurriedly arrived and rescued me from inevitable execution.

Having given himself entirely over to the Lord God and to unfailing prayers for those who appealed to him in person and by mail, St. John still found time to publish religious works. The degree to which his writings were inspired by the Holy Spirit can be somewhat judged from his inspired homilies, which the faithful in church listened to with spiritual trepidation, since it seemed as though St. John were literally reading their doubtful thoughts and providing clear and concise answers to guide them on the path to

eternal salvation.

For the poor and the indigent St. John was not only a miraculous intercessor before the Lord, but quite literally their provider, offering them material and financial aid. He received resources for such aid from wealthy people all over Russia, who wrote to him with fervent requests for prayer. Those who were particularly destitute gathered in great multitudes in front of his House of Industry, and after blessing them, St. John threw money out of a bag to them from the balcony. The same situation could be seen whenever St. John rode through the streets.

Providing an all-around example to the faithful during his life, even after his death St. John did not leave them without his intercession in the Heavenly Kingdom whenever they appealed to him with faith and prayer, receiving miraculous healing from the Lord. S.K.

Kind pastor and miracle-worker

In the 1890s my family lived in Peterhof, the summer residence of the Russian emperors. At that time my father was the head of the Peterhof palace administration. I have no recollection of when and how my parents became acquainted with St. John of Kronstadt, but I know that St. John treated them with great affection. About six times a year St. John came to visit my parents. His arrival led to a great rise in religious fervor not only within our family, but also among our numerous staff. If my father happened to be away from home, he would be immediately informed of St. John's arrival, and he would quickly return home, while St. John, as he waited for my father, sat in the living room and conversed with my mother and us children. As soon as my father arrived, St. John served a moleben and blessed all of us and all the members of our staff. After that he was invited into the dining room, where he only drank a cup of weak tea and ate a piece of white bread, and then proceeded to converse with my parents. When St. John departed, my father always gave him an envelope with money for the poor. As soon as St. John appeared in the driveway, he was usually awaited by a huge crowd of people wishing to receive his blessing, or requesting his prayers for sick family members, or poor people asking for his aid. I saw with my own eyes how St. John would take out the envelope he had received from my father and would hand it over to a destitute person without knowing what sum was inside the envelope. Everyone knew of his extraordinary charity and kindness.



St. John of Kronstadt

Many years have passed since then, but the image of the kind pastor has become deeply-ingrained in my memory: of middle height, lean and middle-aged, with blond hair, kind gray-blue eyes, and a penetrating glance, he always attracted us children. He was always dressed in a dark-gray cassock. He always had a calm appearance and spoke in calm but curt phrases. Among the local populace St. John of Kronstadt enjoyed the greatest respect, and people believed in that the Lord heard his prayers. Batyushka was a true pastor of our Orthodox Church.

In July of 1894 my father became very seriously ill from twisting of the bowels. Local physicians thought that an operation was necessary, and that it was impossible to do without one. Several medical luminaries from Moscow were summoned, while our palace physician, Dr. Yuditskiy, remained constantly at my father's bedside.

The Moscow doctors arrived in the morning and also confirmed the absolute necessity of an operation, which was scheduled for 7:00 in the evening. By that time all the

requisite materials were to be delivered from our palace hospital. My mother sent a telegram to St. John in the city of Kronstadt, asking him to pray for my father. At 3:00 in the afternoon my father was visited by Emperor Alexander III, while at 4:00 St. John himself arrived.

This time he seemed very concerned and concentrated, and immediately went into the bedroom of my father, who lay there with a very high fever. St. John, who was usually calm and quiet, served a moleben very nervously this time.

When he finished the moleben, he came up to my father's bed and said: "Dmitriy Stepanovich, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, sit up!" – Dr. Yuditskiy, who was nearby, ran up to St. John, exclaiming: "Batyushka, the sick man should not move, because his bowels may become perforated!" – To this St. John replied very firmly: "Everything is possible in the name of the Lord" and, turning to my father, again said: "In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, I command you to sit!" Holding a cross in his right hand, with the left he helped my father to sit up. He then sprinkled my sick father with holy water, and after crossing him with the cross, he gave him the cross to kiss, then leaned over my father and kissed him, saying: "The Lord God will make you well; now lay down quietly."

We all kissed the cross, after which St. John went out into the hall next door and gave everyone else the cross to kiss. After that St. John was invited by my mother into the dining room, where, as usual, he drank a cup of weak tea and ate a piece of white bread.

As soon as St. John left my father's bedroom, Dr. Yuditskiy came up to my father and checked his pulse. The pulse had fallen rapidly. Believing that this could have happened because of a perforation of the bowels, Dr. Yuditskiy ran down to the lower floor where the guestrooms were, as well as my father's reception room and office, and where all the guest surgeons were waiting for the evening and the appointed operation. He reported that the sick man's pulse had fallen rapidly, and that a perforation had probably occurred. The doctors hurried upstairs to my father's bedroom. The pulse was normal, and from a high fever the temperature had fallen down to almost normal. The doctors waited for about an hour, in case this was a perforation, but then they were forced to admit that the illness was gone.

The Lord had heeded St. John's prayers, and my father rapidly regained his health and soon afterwards was able to resume his official duties. This miracle of healing was known to all: from Emperor Alexander III and Empress Maria Fedorovna down to the last servant in Peterhof.

Colonel N.D. Pleshko

Pastor of all Russia

(Commemorated November 1st / October 19th, and January 2nd / December 20th)

Those times were called “the 19th century, the iron century.” In accordance with this epithet, iron logic should also have been manifest throughout it. And initially this expectation was being fulfilled. Indeed, was it not clear where Russia was heading in that century – towards materialism and atheism? But how to combine with the theory of the progressive godlessness of Russia the phenomenon of Saint John of Kronstadt, who was born on October 31, 1829?



Initially he did not understand his mission. He dreamed of going off as a missionary to

the Aleuts, to soften the coarse customs of pagans. However, having been appointed priest to Kronstadt, here, too, he discovered enough pagans. Batyushka visited their homes, shared his last with them, sometimes returned home without his outer garments. The church administration was upset with him over this and began to pay out his salary not to him, but to his wife, in order that he not give it away to the poor. Once a certain pious old woman asked him to pray for the healing of a very sick person. "You just ask God directly to heal him." – "How can I show such daring?" – thought St. John, and suddenly felt that he was given permission to do so. And he almost demanded from the Lord to heal the unfortunate sick man. The next day he was told that the latter was fully recovered. From that moment the miracles gushed forth in a powerful stream as was probably never seen in the history of Christianity from the times of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. The blind began to see, the lame began to walk, the dead came back to life. With great delay some of St. John's miraculous healings began to be recorded, with an indication of time and place, the name and address of the person who was healed, and with documents confirming the occurrence, particularly physicians' testimonials. This selective chronicle took up several tomes. The miracles reached an absolutely unprecedented level: people were healed from a note to him, from a submitted photograph, from a telegram!

However, the greatest miracle was St. John of Kronstadt himself. By all laws of nature no man could have survived the daily regimen that he followed, yet he remained in good health until nearly the age of eighty. Every day he served the liturgy, which meant constant fasting and getting up at 3:00 in the morning to prepare for the service. Thousands of people took communion from him, so that the duration of this sacrament was often up to three hours. After that St. John preached a sermon, to which people reacted as to the words of Christ Himself. Afterwards batyushka saw visitors, and then went out to serve privately-requested needs. He returned home late at night, and it is absolutely unfathomable where he still found the time to write his homilies and his thoughts that were published under the name of "My Life in Christ." He obviously lived in an extended dimension of time, and time can be extended only by the One Who created it. His superhuman burden was made more difficult by frequent travels all over Russia, thanks to which hundreds of thousands of people were able to touch upon his holiness. How much he was loved and venerated is attested to by the following: whenever he sailed somewhere on a steamship, crowds ran after him along the shore. And throughout the entire land thundered his appeal: "Learn, O Russia, to believe in the Almighty God, Who rules the fate of the world, and learn faith, wisdom, and courage from your holy forefathers!"

The main theme of his appeals to the people was the intolerability of revolution. "Cease your insanity! Enough, enough!" – thundered his voice all over the world. And with the uncompromising directness of a prophet he presaged: "If things in Russia proceed in this manner, and if the godless and the insane anarchists are not subjected

to the just punishment of the law, and if Russia does not cleanse itself of its multitude of chaff, it will fall into ruin just like the ancient kingdoms...”

The great pastor was unable to prevent the revolution. Does this mean that he suffered defeat? It would undoubtedly seem so: the godless and the madmen did take over. But this is what must give us pause: Russia did not fall into ruin! Moreover, it was able to live through the Civil War and the subsequent destruction, and to restore itself, becoming a mighty power. In pondering this and analyzing the facts, one comes to an amazing conclusion: the post-revolutionary development of Russia, which was renamed the USSR, did not go the way the revolutionaries had intended, and in this sense they did not turn out to be the victors. The Russian people exhibited such unyielding resolve in striving to remain Russian, that the Bolsheviks became exhausted in their struggle against the people’s tenacity. And in our attainment of such strong immunity to godlessness and madness, the help and service St. John of Kronstadt was simply invaluable. The Lord Himself sent him to us, in order to breathe into Russia, on the eve of its great catastrophe, a reserve of spirituality that allowed it to survive under satanic rule.

Viktor Trostnikov (Reprinted from “Argumenty i fakty,” No. 44)

Orthodox Spirituality



In her canonization and glorification of St. John of Kronstadt, the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad not only confirms for her own faithful the sanctity of their beloved and venerated pastor and father, but now holds up his holy example of a life in Christ for the whole world to see. Up to this time, one might say, he has belonged to the Orthodox Russian people. Few outside of faithful Russians have been aware of the last flowering of Holy Russia, of the profoundest Orthodox spirituality that occurred just before the Revolution; St John was the most fragrant blossom of this flowering. In his life of asceticism and constant prayer, in the spiritual care he devoted to the thousands and millions of Orthodox believers who comprised his flock, and above all in the untold

miracles he worked during his own lifetime and after his death, miracles which continue to the present day, – St. John is revealed to be beyond doubt one of the greatest of Russian and, indeed, of all Orthodox Saints.

This great Saint has had a special role to play in the life of the Orthodox Russian people. He was a prophet who foresaw the fall of the Russian Empire and the exile of the Russian faithful. Seeing the spiritual cause of this fall in the worldliness and lack of living faith that were so widespread in the last days of the Empire, he called Orthodox faithful to repentance and renewed awareness of their Christian vocation and responsibility. His appeal is still heard today, and if the Orthodox Russian people dispersed in exile throughout the world are still faithful to Holy Orthodoxy – even if only a small remnant – it is in part due to his still-living example and his holy prayers.

But now St. John, while remaining the spiritual patron of the suffering Russian people, has become a Saint of the universal Orthodox Church of Christ. It is no accident that his canonization has taken place outside of Russia, in the still free world into which he foresaw that the Russian people would be sent, and in which Orthodox churches would be erected, as a testimony of Christian Truth before a world that is, despite its pretensions, unbelieving. To this unbelieving world, in all the languages in which his words have been and will yet be translated, he now speaks the same message that he spoke to the Russian people in his own lifetime. This world, with its imposing outward structure that makes it seem to some so secure, is actually tottering, its foundation rotting away from the self-love and unbelief with which it is filled. Its fall is at hand, and the same godless beast that once swallowed the holy Russian land now stands ready to devour the rest of the world and complete his aim to exterminate the last Christians and lead apostate humanity in its worship of Antichrist.

This, perhaps, is what lies before us if we do not return to the path of a righteous Christian life. There are some who would consider such thoughts of the imminent Second Coming of Christ and the terrible Last Judgment, of which St. John constantly reminded us, to be too “negative.” But if his warnings were correct, then we have to fill our hearts not with fear and terror, but with tearful repentance, with zeal to lead a truly Christian life, and with fervent hope of attaining the Kingdom of Heaven, which is our true home.

It is to nothing but a genuine and profound Christian faith that St. John calls us. In an age when too many pastors preach a “new Christianity” that is only worldliness in disguise, his is a rare and much-needed voice – not for Russians alone, not for Orthodox Christians alone, but for the whole world, if it will but listen.

O holy Saint of Christ, John of Kronstadt, pray to God for us!

Source: http://www.holy-transfiguration.org/library_en/saints_kronst.html