

All Saints of Rus-Ukraine, 2008

Romans 2: 10-16; St. Matthew 4: 18-23

Homily given at All Saints Camp (UOC-USA) in Emlenton, PA

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Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

It really is a glorious day to celebrate the Resurrection of our Lord, God, and Savior, Jesus Christ; as well as to celebrate the lives of All the Saints of Rus'-Ukraine. Indeed, I cannot imagine a more fitting place to celebrate this feast that here at All Saints Ukrainian Orthodox Camp, along with so many spiritual and literal heirs of these Saints.

This camp is something special – a jewel not just of our own diocese, but of the entire Ukrainian Orthodox Church. This is a place where our faithful offer the best of themselves; their treasure, their time, and especially their dearest children to the Lord. And as with all gifts returned to their Maker and Bestower, these are returned in abundance. It is here that we help to train our children and youth (all or you) in the heritage of their ancestral homeland, Rus'-Ukraine. There are many aspects of this heritage worthy of exposition, but for the sake of brevity, I will expound on two of the greatest: Truth and Freedom. Nor are these separate virtues. As our Lord said to the those Jews who believed in Him; “if you abide in my Word, you are my disciples indeed. And you shall know the Truth, and the Truth shall set you free.” (St. John 8:31)

“What is the truth?”. The Truth is that we live in a world mired in sin. Where war, disease, and every manner of suffering threatens to overwhelm us. The Truth is that we were made for something more, and that we yearn for something greater. The Truth is that, while the world will try to satisfy this yearning with diverse entertainments, its satisfaction is possible only through Jesus Christ. The Truth is that Jesus Christ is the God-man who bridges the chasm between us and the perfection we yearn for. The Truth is that through Faith in Him as fully God and fully man, and through the concomitant participation in the Sacraments of His Church, we can cross that bridge and become partakers of God's eternal Divinity.

It was this Truth that led St. Andrew, the first called apostle and “founder of Christ's Church in Ukraine”, to give up everything when he found Jesus and recognized Him as Christ and Messiah (St. John 1: 37-41). It was the pursuit of this Truth that led him, during his missionary journeys, to the banks of the Dnieper and to prophesy the establishment of a Christian kingdom there; and that ultimately led him to his martyrdom on the cross. It was this Truth that led St. Volodymyr to risk everything he had – his life and his kingdom - as he converted not just his own soul, but those of his people and land to Holy Orthodoxy. The Truth changed him as it changed Andrew and as it changes you. Pursuit of the Truth demands action.

Which brings us to the second virtue, freedom. It is true that “freedom is not free”. It requires constant vigilance and sacrifice. Since the time Rus' became Christian, she and her people have known this struggle. Today I would like to focus on three uniquely Ukrainian expressions of this struggle. The first is the Cossacks, the very icon of independence. It is a mistake to think of them as simple anarchists, though. They fought not just for freedom, but for Truth. Their defense of Orthodoxy is as iconic as their fight against tyranny. The second is the brotherhoods. There was a time when Orthodoxy was attacked from every direction – from the West by the Catholic kingdoms, from the North by pagans and Protestants, from the East by a tyrannical Russian Empire, and from the South by the Muslim kingdoms. True worship and teaching was all but exterminated until the Ukrainian people

found a way to beat back the darkness. They organized into brotherhoods that published books, supported priests, and taught the people the Truth about Christ. We would not be here today without their bravery and commitment.

Which brings me to the third expression: this camp. It may seem a stretch to include All Saints Camp in the same group as the great Cossack state and the Orthodox brotherhoods, but it belongs there: it is their direct descendant, organized and committed to the same goals: the defense of Truth and Freedom. You may object that such an attitude is unnecessary here. After all, we live in a free land, protected by a democratic tradition and a well-established Constitution. It is correct that America has all but mastered freedom, but I fear that it has forgotten the Truth. And for this reason America needs this Camp. Freedom without Truth descends quickly into anarchy and hedonism (the pursuit of pleasure). It is the necessary union of these two virtues and the manner of their combination that the Ukrainian Orthodox heritage witnesses to America.

[A personal observation: this is one of the many reasons I am so at home in the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. I and my family have long been in pursuit of these two virtues. It was the same quest for Truth that led my forefathers to immigrate to America and me first to Orthodoxy and ultimately here, to this camp. It was the same abhorrence of tyranny that led them to fight against Britain in the Revolutionary War, and for me to enlist to battle both Communism during Cold War and the new breed of totalitarianism that currently threatens our freedom.]

Yes, we have a tremendous heritage that we have received from All the Saints that have gone on before us. Now it is up to us. Because Truth demands action, and Freedom requires vigilance. We ask for the prayers of All the Saints of Rus' Ukraine as we dedicate ourselves to this struggle.