

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

On the second day of July this year, the Church commemorates the falling-asleep of our Father among the Saints, the Holy Hierarch John, Archbishop of Shanghai and San Francisco. We are blessed to have a beautiful icon of Saint John in the nave of our temple. As I've often mentioned, we tend to think of the saints as people of foreign lands and distant times. However, Saint John is a "contemporary" saint; he reposed in 1966. His relics are venerated in the Cathedral of the Theotokos, the "Joy of All Who Sorrow," the cathedral which was consecrated during his service as archbishop in San Francisco.

This brightly-shining Saint of our own day was born in Russia in 1896. In 1921 his family fled the Russian Revolution to Serbia, where he became a monk and was ordained a priest. From the time of his entry into monastic life he adopted a severely ascetical way of life: for the rest of his life he never slept in a bed, sleeping only briefly in a chair or prostrated before the icons. He ate one meal a day, in the evening. Teaching seminarians in Serbia, he instructed them each day to devote six hours to divine services, six hours to prayer (not including the Divine Services!), six hours to good works, and six hours to rest (these six hours obviously included eating and bathing as well as sleeping). Whether his seminarians followed his counsels we do not know, but he himself not only followed but exceeded them.

In 1934 he was made Bishop of Shanghai, where he served not only the Russian community, but also a number of native Chinese Orthodox; from time to time he served the Divine Liturgy in Chinese. When the Communists took power in China, he labored tirelessly to evacuate his flock to safety, first to the Philippines, then to various western countries including the United States. He served as Bishop in Paris and Brussels, then, in 1962, was made Archbishop of San Francisco. Throughout his life as monk and hierarch he was revered (and sometimes condemned) for his ascetical labors and unceasing intercessions. During his life and ever since, numerous miraculous healings of all manner of afflictions have been accomplished through his prayers. Once, in Shanghai, a caretaker, investigating strange noises in the cathedral after midnight, discovered Bishop John standing in the belltower, looking down on the city and praying for the people. Years later, when he visited Holy Trinity Monastery in Jordanville, New York, the priest responsible for hosting him found the saint walking through the halls of the monastery, standing outside the door of each room and praying for the monk or seminarian sleeping within. When the Archbishop had prayed outside each room, he returned to the beginning of his circuit and began praying again; and so he spent the entire night.

Even as Archbishop, he lived in near-absolute poverty. His appearance was striking: His cassock was made of blue Chinese "peasant cloth," crudely decorated with crosses stitched by orphans who had been in his care in Shanghai. His Bishop's "miter" was often a cloth cap to which he had glued paper icons. Even in the United States, even while serving the Divine Liturgy (which he did every day), he went barefoot in all seasons. (Eventually, after he was hospitalized with an infected foot, his Metropolitan ordered him to wear shoes; after that, he wore sandals). Needless to say, he was an embarrassment to those who like their bishops to make a more worldly appearance, but among his various flocks throughout the world, there were always those who recognized him as a Saint in his own lifetime.

Following his repose in 1966, a steady stream of healings and other miracles was accomplished through his intercessions, and in 1996 he was glorified as a Saint of the Church. His incorrupt and wonder-working relics can be venerated at his cathedral in San Francisco. At St John's funeral, the eulogist told his mourners that, because Archbishop John was able to live the spirituality of the Orthodox Church so fully, even in modern, western, urban society, we are without excuse.

As we remember the life and example of Saint John, let us also ask his intercession before the Throne of God. May his prayers help us live our Orthodox Faith, completely, devotedly, and without excuse.

With love in the Lord,

Father David