

His Eminence  
The Most Reverend  
Metropolitan SABA

The Right Reverend  
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Archbishop of New York and  
Metropolitan of  
All North America

Diocese of Los Angeles  
And the West

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**TEACHING BY BISHOP ANTHONY  
TO BE DISTRIBUTED TO THE FAITHFUL**

## Icons in Our lives

The icons of the Saints meet us peacefully in their place and open to us, like a window or screen door, the Kingdom of God they already occupy and, in Christ, prepare us for: “In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also” (John 14. 2-4).

Their lives point us in the right direction, as we make our own way in life. With them leading us as experienced spiritual guides, we find our way to God and get to know and love Him even now, even in these times. In them, holiness has a melody, and its song of thanksgiving fills us with joy, and we sing too. They pour out quote “rivers of life-giving water” that refresh us and renew our youthfulness. With sanctified people, it is always summer! Their names and portraits and the scenes of their earthly lives convince us that Christ keeps showing himself in people of every age, gender, circumstance and crisis, personal, social, political or economic.

The Saints are the brothers and sisters of Christ: “When we cry, ‘Abba, Father,’ it is the Spirit Himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ...” (Rom. 8.16b-17a). “I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made know to you” (John 15.17b). Jesus Christ is multiplied in his saints. Through them the Most Holy Trinity embraces us with the arms of our own humanity. We see heaven by looking in their eyes.

Jesus sees a family resemblance in each face. All the icons of the saints, and our own faces, our pictures, are part of the gallery of portraits hung in the halls of heaven, God's photo album on display for all to see. He spoils us, because we look like His Beloved Son.

*“The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch” (Acts 11: 26)*

We are His loved ones. He is always showing heavenly home movies of us that the angels have seen a thousand times.

These extended relatives, eternal relatives, are our elder brothers and sisters we look up to, our examples, celestial celebrities of spiritual maturity.

In the world, people are always collecting memorabilia of famous celebrities: signatures, letters, cars and clothes, artistic articles. Auction houses sell them for large sums, from private collections to estate offerings. People, whether religious or not, want to keep memories of others who connected with them or touched them somehow.

Everyone has keepsakes from loved ones, from paperweights to letter openers, from cutlery to crafts, dishware and outerwear. These are relics of recollection and secular sacraments. They are bridges that span time from here and now to then and there, into the ever-after.

When we see the icons of the Saints, we know we are home. We are reminded that where we are now is temporary, a rented dwelling, a transitional property and residence. Our permanent neighborhood is waiting for our moving in. The down payment is our faith. Christ paid the price in full. "He Who has prepared us for this very thing is God, Who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee" (2 Cor. 5.5).

The lives of saints bring eternal values of the ageless Kingdom of God to the threshold of the restless world, challenging its goals, methods and morals. This world evaluates us all the time and puts us in categories that are arbitrary and biased. We are punished or rewarded for the way we look, where we come from, the size of our investments and the square feet of our homes, by possessions, privilege, popularity, power and position.

The saints prayed and fasted and shared with others what they could earn to gain purity of heart, clarity of mind and strength of soul, so that they would not "discriminate in their expression of love because of worldly things," as Saint John Climacus has said. They are a warm breeze that hovers over and covers those who yearn for God's love, or like a wave washes the shore and the soul, leaving it clear, clean and glistening. Anyone in any condition, wealthy or in poverty, male or female, young or old, healthy or sickly can receive this visitation and enjoy this company of the saints. Like God, they are impartial in their compassion and mercy toward other people and gracious toward all God's creatures. If this breeze drifts or these waves move in any direction more regularly, it lists or bends to those most in need. In this humility, it heals division, resentment and neglect within the human family caused by the world's apparatus of distinctiveness and favoritism. Failure and success measured in this way are outside the Kingdom's value system.

The Saints are "sons of the Father," "your Father," as Jesus calls them, sons like the Son. The Father "makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Mat. 5.45). As "sons of the Most High...He is kind to the ungrateful and selfish" (Luke 6.35). "I choose to give to this last as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?" So, the last will be first, and the first last" (Mat. 20.14-16).

God waits for those from the first to the eleventh hour and invites us all to the "marriage supper of the Lamb" (Rev. 19.9).

To forget the saints and ignore their icons removes us from their prayers for us. They are still praying, but we are far from the effects, like a distant voice that fades to silence. Failing to ask for their prayers for us is like stealing from ourselves, plundering our soul's treasure of grace and impoverishing our spiritual powers. We lose the free gift of everlasting joy, peace, love and life, while all the while working to get these things on our own, without the spiritual resources to get them, like people displaced by war, searching in the ruins for what might remain of their former security.

The Saints are our patrons, sharing the blessings of the bounty of their spiritual riches, so we can inherit the Kingdom of God with them. By their relentless zest and zeal, we rely on the reserve of their wisdom, which they have received from their communion with God's uncreated energies that surge through them like electrical current in copper wires.

In looking at them in their holy icons, that same energy penetrates our soul and encourages us to strive for and hope to attain holiness and love for God and for each other. Being with them, we are certain that our own holiness is not only possible but probable and expected.

The bodies of the Saints are temples of the Holy Spirit: "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God?" (1 Cor. 6.19; see also 1 Cor. 3.16-17 and 2 Cor. 6.16b-18b). That is why we call them "God-bearers." It is also why we venerate their holy relics. They lie before us already poised for the resurrection of their bodies in glory: "our Commonwealth is in heaven, and from it we await a savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, Who will change our lowly body to be like His glorious body, by the power which enables Him even to subject all things to Himself" (Phil. 3.20). They are often fragrant relics, heavy with the aroma of paradise, readied to stand in their eternal, glorified bodies, to reign with Christ forever. Their relics are touchable, tangible proof that our bodies, too, will be resurrected, reformed, renewed and remodeled for the Kingdom of God. In our traditional prayer books for priests, we call the procession of the body of those fallen asleep in the Lord "the moving of the 'relics of the deceased.'"

Christ is the “first fruits” (1 Cor. 15.23), the first picking from the Tree of Life, but we are ripe for picking, as through purification, illumination and sanctification we go from bud to blossom to fruit: “Christ is the first fruits, then at His coming those who belong to Christ” (1 Cor. 15.23).

As brothers and sisters of the saints, we ask for their help, by our prayers, to prepare us for life everlasting, where God “will wipe away every tear from [our] eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away” (Rev. 21.1-4; 1 Cor. 15.24-28; Eph. 1.20-23). We kiss their relics and icons, thanking them for the security and peace they give us. We feel their grace, God's grace in them, and smell a scent from heaven, a slight scent of otherworldly paradise. We feel close to God and certain of our immortality. We hear beautiful hymns of heaven and look eagerly for signs of a storm of glory gathering in light, bringing clouds just on the horizon of history, as it resolves into eternity. We can see this sharp light as far as the east from the West.