

The Church-the Treasury of Salvation

by St. John of Kronstadt

The Church is the means for the salvation of man, providing all the necessary means for the salvation of the soul.

Scripture: John 14:16, Romans 8:26, Ephesians 5:25, Ephesians 6:12, 1 John 4:4

Topics: "Church Unity", "Spiritual Warfare"

Description

St. John of Kronstadt preaches about the significance of the Church as the instructor of Christian souls, possessing all the means for man's salvation through grace. He emphasizes the Church as God's supreme establishment on earth, a spiritual army equipped against the devil's forces, a hospital for sinners cured by grace-filled treatments, and a common laver of purification and sanctification. St. John highlights the unity of the Church under Christ, the dangers of self-willed gatherings, and the presence of the Lord within His Church, making a vicar unnecessary.

Transcript

I. Understanding of the Church. The Church as the instructor of Christian souls which possesses all the means for the salvation of man. Grace.

The holy Church is God's most supreme, most holy, most good, most wise and necessary establishment upon the earth. She is "the true tabernacle" of God, "which the Lord pitched, and not man" (Heb. viii. 2)--not Luther, not Calvin, and not Mohammed, nor Buddha, nor Confucius, nor any other suchlike sinful, passionate person. The Church is a union of people established by God, united among themselves by the Faith, Doctrine, Hierarchy, and Mysteries. She is Christ's spiritual army, equipped with spiritual weaponry against the numberless armed hordes of the devil: "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Eph. vi. 12). She is a spiritual hospital where mankind, enfeebled by the open wound of sin, is cured by grace-filled treatments given by God--by repentance and communion in the Holy Mysteries of Christ, in Christ's Body and Blood, and by the word of God, by the instructions and counsels and consolations of the shepherds of Christ's rational flock. She is a common laver of purification, rebirth, and sanctification; she is God's sanctuary in which all are sanctified by the Holy Spirit through Baptism, Chrismation, and the other Mysteries, and the Divine Service. She is the spiritual sun of the world, enlightening and giving life to all who sit in the darkness and shadow of death and who are dead through sin.

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In nature there is the law of the attraction of smaller bodies to larger ones, and these in turn to still larger ones, and also the law of the attraction of cohesion (the cohesion of the various soft, hard, and fluid parts of organic bodies, and likewise of non-organic bodies--of rocks, metals, minerals, petrifications); whereby is conditioned the existence, firmness, order, use, beauty, mutual bond, and diversity of all created things. The reason for this is the measureless wisdom, goodness and infinite omnipotence of the Creator, Who has made such a wonderful, majestic, and beautiful world, of endless diversity and marvelous magnitude, a work which presents itself as a single harmonious, fair unalterable whole.

In the spiritual world there also exists a law of mutual attraction and unity. The world is one, God is one, the Faith is one, and God's Church is one; for Her Head is Christ God, and Her Pilot, Who quickens the whole body of the Church, is the Spirit of God, "the giver of life, Who also quickens and fills the entire universe.

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With what wonderful tender care, overflowing with love, did the Heavenly Father honor the human race which was perishing in sins! What extraordinary means was given to men for salvation from sins from the curse, and from eternal perdition! What a marvelous mighty single-handed Combatant (Christ) was sent from heaven against the powerful, wicked, most malignant antagonist of the race of men--the devil! What a Church, established upon the earth, insuperable by any of the forces of hades, a castle and bastion in which all who truly believe and are truly devoted to this Church can abide without danger from the antagonist! What saving Mysteries have been granted! What and how many rational instruments and preachers of God's grace are placed in this Church for the people! But what indeed must men bring to the Lord in return for His great care for their salvation?--Their faith, their labor, their repentance, their self-denial, their earnest struggle against sin, exercise in the acts of virtue, utter subservience to the Lord and His Church.

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The Church is one; Her Head is one; the flock is one; the body is one with many members. Without the Head--Christ--the Church is not the Church, but a self-willed gathering. Such are the Lutherans, the Russian Old Believers, the Pashkovtsy and the followers of Tolstoy.

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"I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. xxviii. 20). The Lord Himself is ever-present in His Church;--why then a vicar, the pope? And can a sinful man take the place of the lord? He cannot. There can be, and there are, vicars for the Tsar, for the Patriarch, but no one can be a vicar, a substitute, for the Lord, Who is the Tsar without beginning and the Head of the Church. Truly, the Catholics have gone astray. Suggest to them, O Lord, that those who affirm such things are foolish and laid around with pride as with a necklace.

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The most harmful thing in Christianity, in this God-revealed, heavenly religion, is the leadership of one man in the Church--for instance, the pope, and his supposed infallibility. It is precisely in the dogma of his infallibility that the greatest mistake is contained, for the pope is a sinful man, and O the disaster if he fancies himself to be infallible! How many great errors, destructive of the souls o men, has the Catholic,

papal church thought up--in dogmas, in rites, in canonical rules, in the Divine Services, in the deadly and malicious relations of the Catholics with the Orthodox, in blasphemies and slanders against the Orthodox Church, in revilings directed against the Orthodox Christians! And of all this the professedly infallible pope is guilty, with his and the Jesuits' teaching, their spirit of falsehood, duplicity, and every sort of unrighteous means ad maiorem Dei gloriam (for the--alleged--greater glory of God).

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We are members of the Holy Orthodox Church, members of the Body of Christ, whose Head is Christ God Himself, but each is a member individually; Christ is holy, the Head of the body, and therefore the members also must be holy.

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Christians are members of the Church, and the Church is the Body of Christ, with the Head being Christ Himself, and the Enlightener, the Holy Spirit. "Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself for It, ... that He might present It to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that It should be holy and without blemish" (Eph. v. 2¹-27). You are the holy and chosen flock, you are members of the holy catholic and apostolic Church. What indeed is demanded of you! What holiness, what truth! What attention to yourselves! What spiritual contemplation and activity in secret! What morals, virtues, what faith, what hope, what love! What abstinence, compassion, care for one another, what urging of one another to virtue!

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After the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles is described in the book of Acts, the all-providential activity of the Holy Spirit in the Church is often mentioned, His most sovereign guidance through the Apostles, by means of their salutary preaching and actions within the Church. Indeed, this is the "other Comforter" (John xiv. 16), Who is all-good and all-true, Whom the Lord Jesus Christ promised to send to the Apostles.--Glory to Thee, O Holy Spirit, the life-creating Comforter, acting unceasingly everywhere within the Church of Christ. Convert, O Lord, by the judgments which Thou knowest, the peoples gone astray--the Jews, Mahometans, pagans, and within Christianity itself, the heretical and schismatical peoples and races; reprove and uproot vices; direct them to piety and enlighten the Orthodox Christians of impiety and corruption and direct all upon the way of salvation; teach and guide the youth, protect childhood, cause babyhood to grow and guide them by Guardian Angels, instruct men young and old, enlighten and strengthen both men and women through Thy most good, most wise, all-powerful dominion, and fortify and guide them unto every virtue, dispersing sinful passions like darkness for the sake of Christ our Lord, by the good will of the Father. Amen.

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Mighty and all-powerful is the intercession of the Holy Church before God, which is clothed in the merits, power, truth, and magnificence of the Son of God, of Her all-good and all-powerful Head. All things are possible to Her intercession. No other, heterodox church possesses such power of intercessions since they are without the Head and are wrong in their thinking.

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The Christian must unremittingly care for his spiritual education for which he was born anew in the holy font through the Holy Spirit, received spiritual regeneration, and was sealed with chrism, or the seal of the Holy Spirit, and was made worthy of the right to communicate in the Most immaculate Blood of Christ.--According to, God's intent, the holy Church is the first and most lawful educator of Christian souls. There is no more important work than that of Christian education. Judge and understand for yourselves how dear are these rational, immortal souls unto God, which were redeemed by the Blood of the Son of God Himself, which were called out of the darkness of ignorance into the light of the knowledge of God by the Lord Himself, which were betrothed and united to the Lord as pure virgins to a most pure Bridegroom! How dear is the salvation of these souls, to whom He offers His most immaculate Body and most pure Blood as food and drink, whom He Himself undertook to educate spiritually through these wonderful, dreadful, life-creating and deifying Mysteries! Devote yourselves, all of you, to your spiritual education with all attention and diligence; devote yourselves to thoughts concerning God, to prayer, self-investigation, self-condemnation, with self-amendment in every way; exercise yourselves in the virtues of meekness, humility, obedience, patience, compassion, chastity, simplicity, guilelessness and cut off all sinful thoughts, lusts, habits, passions.

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Our negligence, carelessness, and laziness concerning our salvation is amazing; for how many means, faculties, and conveniences are granted to us for it by the all-compassionate and greatly merciful Lord! First: our natural thirst for salvation, peace, and blessedness in the soul; the light of the understanding and the yearning of our will for all that is true, good, beautiful, pure, exalted; the abundance of grace given to us for salvation, which flows like rivers within the Church and fills the souls thirsting for salvation; the nearness and readiness of the Lord to save us at every time and every moment; "the Spirit Himself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered" (Rom. viii. 26), the assistance and co-operation of our guardian angels for our salvation, the daily Divine Service in the Church, the saving Mysteries, prayers, and intercession of the Mother of God and all the Saints. It is amazing how in the face of all this we can still perish, and not all be saved. Certainly there are many things that impede our salvation: temptations from our too-passionate flesh, from the adulterous and sinful world, from the devil who has everywhere laid snares for our destruction; the corruption of our nature, our sinful conception and birth in sin; the inclinations and habits of sin. However, far greater are the means for salvation than the means to perdition. "For greater is He that is in you (Christ), than he that is in the world (the devil)" (I John iv. 4), and all the Saints overcame all obstacles and were saved. But what do we do? We drowse and sleep! Shameful, sinful, painful, woeful! Sin gains power over us in that it has buried itself deeply in us and has taken its seat in us, in our hearts, in our passionate flesh, and has made itself a fortress out of our own passions, out of our self-love, concupiscence, love of honor, pride, love of possessions, incontinence, self-conceit, little faith, unbelief, free-thinking, hypocrisy, partiality, laziness; and by these passions, as with mighty weapons, it shoots us down and takes us into captivity, cutting us off, alienating us from Christ, our true Life. Wherefore he who desires salvation must dig, delve into his heart, and lay his foundation upon the rock, that is, upon Christ the Saviour, upon strong, unshakable faith in Him, upon hope on Him, and upon no one and nothing else,--upon strong love for Him and his neighbor.

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In His Church the Lord acts with us as the Creator, the skillful Artist and Reconstructor, as the Father, wise Physician, and Saviour, the Provider, the Commander of life, Nurturer, Law-giver, the Leader of His spiritual troops, the Single-handed Combatant, the Victor. Indeed, man is in His hands--His creation,

rational in His image, destined for immortality and yet fallen, broken, defiled, cast away from God because of sins;--His creation, which was accursed, but by the mercy and compassions of the Only-begotten Son of God, was redeemed, raised up from fallenness, delivered from the curse, and honored once more with the blessing of the heavenly Father through the intercession and merits of the Son, delivered from the darkness of transgressions, illumined by the heavenly light of the Gospel of Christ, fashioned anew and purified from the dross and uncleanness of sin, washed in the mystic Bath, made sweet-smelling by holy Chrism and sealed upon all the senses with the seal of the Holy Spirit, guided along the path of salvation to the kingdom and blessedness on high, strengthened in his warfare with sin and the hostile evil powers by the Lord Himself, mystically nourished in the grace of the Holy Spirit by the Heavenly Bread, guided by invisible shepherds invested with spiritual authority by the Almighty Head of the Church Himself, the Lord Jesus Christ. You ask: Why are there such-and-such Mysteries in the Church; why priesthood and pastorship; why churches, why Divine Service, why ceaseless preaching of the Word of God ? Why repentance, why participation in the holy Mysteries?--All this is indispensable for the re-creation, enlightenment, guidance, and strengthening of fallen, defiled, corrupt, perishing man. Behold why the grace of Baptism, recreation, regeneration, and renewal by the Holy Spirit are necessary. Thou art honored with the greatest honor, O man: thou art destined to be a bearer of the Godhead, a God-bearer. Hast thou heard of the God-bearing Fathers, who constantly had God within themselves, as in living temples not made by hands ? And thou shouldst: be just such a God-bearer; unto thee it is given to partake of the Body and Blood of the God-man Christ for just this reason: in order that the Lord should ever abide in thee, according to His word and promise: "He that eateth My Flesh and drinketh My Blood, dwelleth in Me, and I in him" (John vi. 56).

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Christ came to renew human nature which had been corrupted by sin, and entrusted this greatest work of His goodness, mercy, truth, and wisdom to His Holy Church. The Holy Spirit, Who came into the world and Who operates in the Church through the clergy, the Divine Service, the sermon, and the Mysteries, works this renewal without ceasing. Only within the Church is this renovating force contained, outside the Church it does not exist and cannot.

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