

The Sanctification of the Human Body (Metropolitan Athanasios of Lemessos)

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)



The human person is the temple of the living God. This is an Apostolic teaching of our Church, which means that, just as the grace of God, the grace of the Holy Spirit, resides in a church, the same is true of the human body and we are temples of the living God. We call God living because He's not cut off somewhere in the heavens and we simply believe in Him, accept Him, but because He resides in us and we are His temple. Naturally, Saint Paul doesn't mean that part of our existence is the temple of God, but that the whole person is destined to become the temple of God and when this is achieved, it becomes a reality. This is the reason why we show great respect and honour to the whole of the human person.



When we honour the saints of the Church, who are people who have confirmed that

they're truly temples of the living God, who have observed His commandments and have found the truth, we don't honour just their souls or their teaching or even their intellect. We honour the saints as whole people, persons who have been sanctified in their entirety, soul and body. This is why we venerate the holy relics of the saints in the Church, their bones, which received the grace of the Holy Spirit and are temples of the living God. This is why we Orthodox don't simply honour the relics, as we would our ancestors, but we embrace the relics, the objects, the icons of the saints, because we really believe that, in this way, we communicate with the grace of the Holy Spirit which these saints have. Naturally, they didn't have it only in this life, but have it more so now, when they're alive in the presence of God.

It's difficult for people in the West to understand the reverence we Orthodox feel towards the saints when we venerate their relics. They don't venerate relics because one of the greatest crimes committed by the Popes and the Vatican is that they destroyed the Orthodox theology, which they shared until about the 10th century, concerning our deification and so now they don't know even theoretically that people can be glorified. They think of sainthood as a kind of prize which God hands out. This is why the halo in Western depictions is like a disk above the head, like a prize. In Orthodoxy, it's all around the face of the saint, because glorification has to do with the whole being of the saint and embraces them entirely. It's not a prize given to them by God, but something which we do, indeed, receive from Divine Grace, but as the result of our free co-operation with God. People are sanctified entirely. This is why, in natural terms, sanctity is identified with morality and external integrity, but this alone is not the case in the Orthodox Church. The saints are, of course, moral and upright, but the grace of the Holy Spirit transcends these, human, worldly features and is an uncreated energy of God which covers the whole of a person's being, so that he or she is sanctified as a whole. As it says in the Acts of the Apostles- and this is a clear answer to Jehovah's Witnesses and Protestants- the woman with the issue of blood went and touched the hem of Christ's garment and was immediately healed. So we ask: is it possible that the clothing worked the miracle? Of course not. It was Christ who performed it. He performed it through His garment and, of course, through the woman's faith. It also says in Acts, that as soon as the shadow of the Apostles fell on the sick, the latter were healed. They even used their cloaks to perform miracles. It's through our faith and the grace of the Holy Spirit that wonders were and are still worked. Naturally, the saints don't perform miracles themselves: it's the grace of the Holy Spirit residing in them and their things which acts together with people's faith and which performs miracles, cures and all the other familiar effects which holy relics and icons perform for those who approach them in faith.

And when Saint Paul talks about sins of the flesh, it's because we have a duty to keep our bodies pure and free of any defilement, of any sin. Because the body is destined to be glorified, the whole of the body is destined for deification and sanctification. When we're baptized, the whole of us is baptized, because we're sanctified as a unified whole. For this reason, the relics of departed Christians are always respected and well-preserved. This is also why the Church doesn't accept cremation: not that Christ would have any difficulty in resurrecting the dead who'd been cremated, but rather that the burial and interment of the bodies of the dead is an expression of our faith that the body is sacred and is destined for

sanctification and glorification, meanwhile awaiting the resurrection of the dead.

(to be continued)