



St. John of Rila: The Fruits of Faith and Non-Faith

Thine angelic life hath been the foundation of repentance, the prescription of compunction, the model of consolation and spiritual perfection, O venerable father John, who abode in prayers, fasting and tears. Entreat Christ God in behalf of our souls. (Troparion to St. John of Rila)

Today the Eastern Orthodox Church celebrates the glorious memory of our Venerable Father John of Rila, the earthly angel and heavenly man. From earliest youth he labored in mind, heart, and with all the power of his will to address the Christian's main task: to put aside the old man with his pernicious deeds and to *put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness* (Ephesians 4:24). Thanks to his firm and unrelenting determination and to the grace of God, which is always ready to assist the true laborer, he resolved this task triumphantly and gloriously, attaining the glorious crown of incorruptible life.



The fact is, my dear brothers and sisters, that from our very conception and birth we have all inherited the filth and corruption of sin, which separates us from God the source of life; it decays and gradually destroys our entire being, both soul and body, plunging us into eternal darkness and torment, corrupting the body and turning it into earth.

St. John wholly triumphed over this terrible corruption, as did all the ascetic strugglers akin to him, attaining an incorruptible, eternal, and blessed life in heaven. How did he gain a glorious victory over all-defiling sin and attain the fragrance of holiness and perfect God-pleasingness? This is explained by the short hymn compiled in his honor and sung on his day of commemoration. He drove sin from himself, wholly cleansing it through mindfulness of his sins; through tears of repentance, constant prayer and



physical labors; through perfect non-possessiveness; through comforting all who came to him with their sorrow for sin; and through constant striving for Christian perfection and holiness – meekness, humility, obedience, temperance, patience, and mercy – so that his life became equal to the angels. He lived bodily on earth, but in mind and heart in heaven, with God, Whom he loved ardently and with Whom he united, becoming one spirit with Him; for *he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit with the Lord*, says the Apostle (1 Corinthians 6:17).

Juxtaposing the life of this venerable one, and of all the holy God-pleasers, with the life of the people of this world – especially with our contemporaries – I see the perfect opposition of one to the other. In one, there is life and unwavering light in their souls; quiet contemplation, repentance, unceasing prayer, and peaceful labor of spirit and body; with benevolence and love towards all. But in worldly people there is the constant agitation of the passions, tumult, offences, sedition, mutual hostility, pride, insubordination to authority, lack of faith, and self-assertion. In yet others there is denial of all the laws of God and man; unruly self-rule (autonomy); encroachment on other's property, freedom, and life; and complete denial of the immortality of the soul, the resurrection, and eternal judgment. Such indeed must be the fruits of unbelief. Today's mutineers are prepared to destroy the entire order of ecclesiastical, civil, and family life, bringing human society into a state of anarchy and barbarism.

Who declared this war of extermination against God and man? It was he who was the first mutineer in heaven, declaring war against God and the Angels, and who was himself cast down to the earth. The Lord says: *I beheld Satan as lightening fall from heaven* (Luke 10:18). This is he who – by God's allowance and for people's testing, by detecting their thoughts, inclinations, and passions – produces all sorts of trouble, sedition, and murder here in Russia and throughout the entire world, making people who have trampled upon their conscience into his weapons.

Our poor fatherland, tormented by seditious adversaries! Turn sincerely to the faith of your fathers and root out the weeds that are choking the wheat; advance, people devoted to God and His Church; arise by God's power and hold firmly to the Church's cornerstone: Christ, the Almighty God and Savior!

Whosoever shall fall upon that stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder (Luke 20:18). Amen.

Delivered on October 19 / November 1, 1905.

Translated from the [Russian](#)