**St. Nicholas**

This Friday we celebrated the feast of St. Nicholas the Wonderworker—one of the greatest Saints of the Church. Sadly, the image of St. Nicholas most people know today is in the form of Santa Claus, an over-indulgent and completely secular figure who’s in the business of making himself the focus of Christmas and taking away that focus from the real reason for the season: Christ’s life-giving Incarnation and Nativity.

The contrast between Santa Claus and the real St. Nicholas is seen perhaps in the greatest light when one considers that St. Nicholas’ entire life, from infancy to his falling asleep, was dedicated to serving and glorifying God. All of St. Nicholas’ many miracles were never about him, but always indicative of his love of God the Holy Trinity and his love of neighbor even more than self.

St. Nicholas’ is revered throughout the Orthodox Church in every land.

St. Nicholas gave to the poor, but he also prioritized ministering to those who were poor in faith. He saved the three daughters of a poor man who was about to sell them into slavery to buy food, secretly tossing through their window one bag of gold a month to save each of the daughters. St. Nicholas also fervently and lovingly preached the Gospel of Christ and defended the holy Orthodox Faith from the Arians, even striking Arias for in the First Ecumenical Council for the blasphemous words protruding from his mouth against the One, true God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

We learn from St. Nicholas to be contented, generous in giving, fervent in speaking and living the Truth of Christ, and, we learn from him to be thankful in spirit, returning to God often to praise and worship Him for His work in our lives. St. Nicholas teaches us, in fact, to live our whole lives oriented toward God and His deifying worship, the spiritual well from which flows such love in action.

Similarly, our Nativity Fast, our Advent, can be swallowed up with the secular, commercial, and busy aspects of Santa Claus’ Christmas, or, we can redeem the times, and follow the lead of St. Nicholas in glorifying God this holy season, striving to keep Christ in our focus at all times, returning regularly to Him in thanksgiving, and deepening our relationship and communion with Him. If we do so, this Christmas, as we come together to worship Him in the Winter Pascha, the service of the Feast of the Nativity, we’ll find that Christ meets us there, in the midst of the Feast, filling it with true spiritual joy, peace, meaning that fills our eternal souls to overflowing with thanksgiving.

For this purpose, I urge you to make a priority of worshiping God of putting Christ first; like the one leper, return to Christ to give Him thanks for His work in our life and that of our family. It’s vital that we demonstrate before our children that this is the true meaning of Christmas. This is what they can give back to God: their true worship—it is these thankful, worshiping beings that God has created us to become.

Today, St. Nicholas points us to Him whom the angels sing, whom the shepherds and magi adore. We call on St. Nicholas to enjoin our prayers, that we too may grow in his obedience and humility; that we possess such boldness in proclaiming and living the Gospel of Christ and the holy Orthodox Faith in our own day.

These are the gifts worthy of asking St. Nicholas to help supply through his intercessions for us this day. May we, by following his example of faith, continue the work he performed during his life and thereafter to glorify God the Holy Trinity, to keep Christ before us in all things and at the center of our Christmas and our whole lives. May we fill this holy season with real and lasting meaning: with worship, service and song, just as St. Nicholas models for us.

Holy St. Nicholas, pray for us sinners that we may, like the one leper, may return to give thanks to God for the greatest of gifts this Nativity: His love, healing, and salvation.