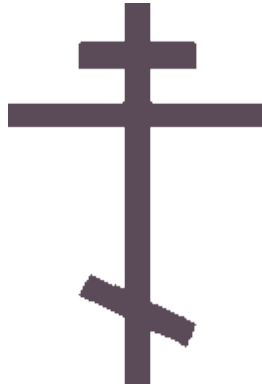


St. John of Kronstadt



St. John of Kronstadt (1908 AD)

Our righteous father John of Kronstadt (*October 19, 1829, in Sura – December 20, 1908, in Kronstadt*) was an archpriest of the Russian Orthodox Church.

He was born as Ivan Ilyich Sergiyev in 1829. From 1855, he served as a priest in St. Andrew's cathedral in Kronstadt. Here, he greatly committed himself to charity, especially for those who were remote from the church, and traveled extensively throughout the Russian empire. He was a member of the right extremist movement Sojuz Russkogo Naroda (Alliance of the Russian people) but did not commit himself politically. He was already greatly venerated at the time he died. He was glorified by the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia in 1964 and by the Russian Orthodox Church on June 8, 1990. The second largest monastery in St. Petersburg (*by community size*) is dedicated to St. John of Kronstadt.

His feast days are commemorated on December 20 and October 19.

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"When you are praying alone, and your spirit is dejected, and you are wearied and oppressed by your loneliness, remember then, as always, that God the Trinity looks upon you with eyes brighter than the sun; also all the angels, your own Guardian Angel, and all the Saints of God. Truly they do; for they are all one in God, and where God is, there are they also. Where the sun is, thither also are directed all its rays. Try to understand what this means."

"There is nothing impossible unto those who believe; lively and unshaken faith can accomplish great miracles in the twinkling of an eye. Besides, even without our sincere and firm faith, miracles are accomplished, such as the miracles of the sacraments; for God's Mystery is always accomplished, even though we were incredulous or unbelieving at the time of its celebration. "Shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect?" (Rom. 3:3). Our wickedness shall not overpower the unspeakable goodness and mercy of God; our dullness shall not overpower God's wisdom, nor our

infirmity God's omnipotence." — *My Life in Christ*

"Oh, what great happiness and bliss, what exaltation it is to address oneself to the Eternal Father. Always, without fail, value this joy which has been accorded to you by God's infinite grace and do not forget it during your prayers; God, the angels and God's holy men listen to you."

"The enemy of our salvation especially strives to draw our heart and mind away from God when we are about to serve Him, and endeavours to adulterously attach our heart to something irrelevant. Be always, every moment, with God, especially when you pray to Him. If you are inconstant, you will fall away from life, and will cast yourself into sorrow and straitness."

"Do not be despondent when fighting against the incorporeal enemy, but even in the midst of your afflictions and oppression praise the Lord, Who has found you worthy to suffer for Him, by struggling against the subtlety of the serpent, and to be wounded for Him at every hour; for had you not lived piously, and endeavored to become united to God, the enemy would not have attacked and tormented you."

"Do not fear the conflict, and do not flee from it; where there is no struggle, there is no virtue. Our faith, trust, and love are proved and revealed in adversities, that is, in difficult and grievous outward and inward circumstances, during sickness, sorrow, and privations."

"Prayer for others is very beneficial to the man himself who prays; it purifies the heart, strengthens faith and hope in God, and arouses love for God and our neighbor."

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Father John of Kronstadt, one of the most well known saints of recent history, possessed an evangelical fervour, and, above all, was 'flesh of the flesh' of the Orthodox tradition and of the faith and life of the Orthodox Church. Father John was an expressive and impressive preacher, an promoter of frequent communion, a man who moved the hearts of hardened sinners to repentance, a man with a great depth of love, and a spiritual healer. Huge crowds flocked to him from all parts of Orthodox Russia to hear him and to be healed by him (in body and soul).

Father John believed in indulging people with love. To indulgent people with love means not to judge, not to take revenge, and to endure and forgive. "Do not confuse man -this image of God - with the evil which is in him, because evil is only his accidental misfortune, a sickness, a devil's dream; but man's essence - the image of God - is always there". This recognition of God in others is the rule he used in relating to others. He also said, "As far as is it possible, be gentle, humble and simple to all, considering yourself, without hypocrisy, to be spiritually below everyone. Pride is the reason for a cold, pompous and insincere manner towards those whom are considered to be below us, or those from whom we hope to derive some benefit. When people speak ill of you and you feel resentment, it means that you are proud, and pride must be eliminated from your heart by worldly dishonour. Therefore, do not resent and hate

those who speak ill of you, but try to love them as you would love people who benefit you, and pray for them. Maintain a peaceful and loving disposition towards your brother even if he deprives you of your last shilling; show him that, above all, you love God's image in him. However most people are angry when they are deprived even of a very small part of their property!"

One of the basic aims of love is to see everyone saved, transformed and united to true, divine love. This is impeded by what he called "malicious joy" when he said, "Oh, how disgusted I am by this devilish malicious joy over the sins of one neighbour! People cast a slur on someone's whole life because of one sin that he has committed. They forget that love extenuates everything. A Christian must truly wish for himself and others, that God's name should be constantly glorified in both himself and others, that all should become Temples of God".

However, sobriety from evil is not enough. We should also seek to obtain inner peace, since "without inner peace and harmonious coexistence with others, one cannot have peace and harmony within oneself. In acquiring inner peace, let us also be peacemakers in relation to our fellowmen".



To attain peace and love, and to preserve them, "Do not be put out of countenance when you are angry and when this anger prepares to manifest itself in words, command it to be silent. When you allow anger to express itself, it will pour out with great force and may overwhelm your defence". He continued, "Do not expose all your impurities, not to contaminate others with the breath of evil concealed in you. It is better to speak of your illness to your spiritual father or your friend in order that they may direct and restrain you".

On reproaching others of their evil he said, "It is better not to pass on reproachful words, but to keep silent about them or, even if it is not true, convey words of love and goodwill; then our spirits will be at peace" and, "if you wish to correct somebody's faults of your own accord, restrain yourself, because, usually, through our pride and irritability, we do more harm than good... Pray to God that He Himself will enlighten the mind and the hearts of men; if God sees that your prayer is full of love, He most certainly will grant your wish. An embittered person is ill; to cure him we must apply to his heart a plaster of Love", and finally, "Look at every human being as if he were unique in God's world, a great miracle of God's wisdom and grace, and do not let the fact that you are accustomed to him serve as a ground for neglect".

"Our Saviour bids us to love our enemies which is extremely difficult; but for a heart which is reborn through grace, it is easy to do so because God helps the believer in everything".

The reader is refer to The Life of Father John of Kronstadt by Bishop Alexander, published by St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, as a good introduction to his life and as an outline of his spiritual message.

Holy Righteous John of Kronstadt on Prayer

We print below an excerpt from the sermon on the fortieth day after the decease of Father John of Kronstadt by the New-martyr of Russia, Metropolitan Seraphim Chichagov, who, in the course of thirty years, was a spiritual son of the All-Russian pastor.

Father John had the greatest gift of prayer. This was his distinctive characteristic. He profoundly believed with all his heart in the grace, given to him as a priest by God, to pray for God's people, and that the Lord is as close to the believing Christian as his own body and heart, for our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit Who lives within us, Whom we have from God (I Corinthians 6:19). He believed in prayer, that as the shadow follows the body, the deed also follows the word, inasmuch as with the Lord, word and deed are not separated, and, not allowing the smallest doubt in the fulfilling of his petitions by God, he asked completely simply, sincerely, as a child, with living, clear-sighted faith in the Lord, representing Him not only standing before him, but as though being himself in Him, in such closeness. He regarded doubt as blasphemy against God, as an impertinent lie of the heart and said: "Is it not enough for us to see impotence in men, that we want to see impotence in God Himself as well, and we secretly think that God will not fulfill our petition?!"

When Father John prayed, he tried in general to pray more for all the faithful than for himself alone, not separating himself from the believers and being in spiritual unity with them. If he saw shortcomings in a man or any passions, he always prayed secretly for him, no matter where: while serving the Liturgy, whether en route somewhere or in conversation. When driving along the street and seeing wanton people, he would at once raise up his heartfelt prayer to the Lord and cry: "O Lord, enlighten the mind and heart of this Thy servant; cleanse him from defilement!" - or with other words from the psalms more appropriate to the given person. He would not let an occasion pass to pray for a man at someone's request; he rejoiced at such a request, considering that prayer for others is good also for him himself, because it cleanses the heart, confirms faith and hope in God, kindles love for Christ and one's neighbor. Father John prayed according to the faith of the petitioners in his prayer and never ascribed anything to himself. If he had to instruct the erring or comfort those that had fallen into despair, at the end of the conversation he unfailingly invited those present to pray together for that man, sincerely realizing that one cannot correct the shortcomings of others by words alone, but one must obtain God's help and power by prayer.

A characteristic of Father John's prayer feat lay as well in the fact that he, with unusual attentiveness, watched the heartiness of his prayer and would at once stop it for a time if he realized that the prayer was becoming only external, mechanical, so to

say. He would exercise himself in the movements of his heart at prayer and thereby confirm that characteristic of his spirit of which I spoke at the beginning. Considering prayer that is only mental or superficial to be an affront to God, Who calls mankind to Himself by the words: "My son, give me thine heart" (Proverbs 23:26), Father John taught that it is good to render obedience in all things to Mother Church, to read the long prayers appointed by the Typicon and akathists; but one should do this with good sense, and whoever can accommodate lengthy prayer - let him accommodate it; but if this lengthiness is incompatible with fervor of spirit, then it is better to make a short prayer, for as the Holy Apostle says: "The Kingdom of God is not in word, but in power" (I Corinthians 4:20). "While praying, we ought without fail to take possession of the heart and turn it to the Lord, but never allow even one exclamation to God which does not proceed from the depth of the heart. When we shall learn during prayer to speak from the heart only the truth - that which we actually realize and feel then sincere or true prayer will cleanse our heart from falsehood and we shall not permit ourselves to lie in life either" (...)

Dear Batiushka Father John struck and sometimes shook everyone by the profundity of his prayer. On the basis of my conversations with him, I can only thus depict his prayerful state. He stood before the Lord, as before the sun, and, feeling the inexpressible brilliance of the divine light, closed his eyes and manifestly perceived his being in the rays of this light, and from them - warmth, joy and closeness to Christ the Saviour. During prayer after communion of the Holy Mysteries, Batiushka sometimes felt how He, after the Resurrection, passed through the walls of the house to the Apostles, and then he received the consciousness that his invisible soul is at rest in the invisible God.

But in order to understand the faith and spirit of Batiushka Father John, it was necessary to pray with him in the altar during the Liturgy. At the beginning, he diligently commemorated all of the living and the dead at the Table of Oblation, prayed with tears for everyone, boldly begged the Lord for the afflicted and the suffering, at times went away, then returned again and prayed anew, knelt, embraced the discos and visibly suffered together with the people for whom he prayed. When the Liturgy began, he still continued to commemorate at the Table of Oblation from the numerous notes that were read to him, but for the reading of the Holy Gospel he always returned to his place and listened with complete attention to the word of God, carefully considering every word, nodding his head as a sign of the immutability and truthfulness of the Good Tidings. At the transferral of the Holy Gifts to the Altar Table, the great man of prayer began, as it were, to prepare for a joyful meeting with the Lord and already thought more about those present in church, about their participation in the common prayer and in the common joy with him, and he sometimes prayed for them thus: "O Lord! Many of those standing in Thy church are standing idle in their souls, as idle vessels, and they know not for what it is fitting to pray; fill their hearts now on this day of salvation with the grace of Thine All-Holy Spirit and grant them to me, to my prayer, to my love, filled with the knowledge of Thy goodness and contrition and heartfelt compunction; grant them Thy Holy Spirit, Who makes intercession for them with groanings that cannot be uttered!" (Romans 8:26) (...)

In performing the Liturgy, the unforgettable Batiushka found for himself the greatest enjoyment and blessedness. "I am extinguished, I die spiritually," he said, "when I do not serve in church for several days, and I am enkindled, I am enlivened in soul and heart, when I serve, forcing myself to prayer - not formal, but real, spiritual, sincere, flaming prayer. I love to pray in God's church, in the holy altar, at the Altar Table and the Table of Oblation, for I am miraculously changed in church by God's grace; during prayer of repentance and compunction, the bonds of the passions fall away from my soul, and it becomes so easy for me. I die, as it were, to the world, and the world, with all its good things, dies to me; I live in God and for God, for the One God, and I am wholly penetrated by Him and abide one with Him. I become like a child, comforted on the knees of its mother; my heart is full of super-celestial, sweet peace, my soul is enlightened by heavenly light. You see everything radiantly, you look at everything correctly; concord and love are felt toward all, toward enemies themselves, and you readily excuse and forgive them! O, how blessed is the soul with God!

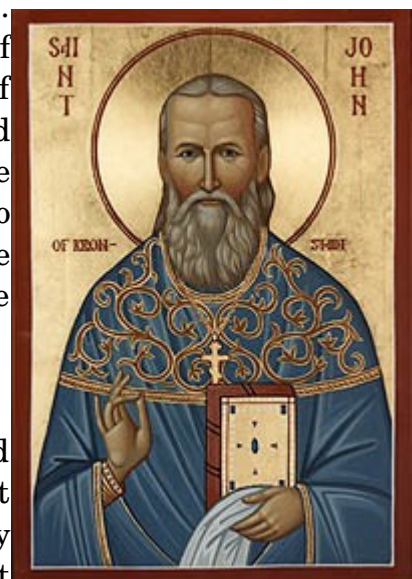
"The Church is truly an earthly paradise! What boldness you have toward the Lord and the Theotokos! What meekness, humility and benignity! What impartiality toward the earthly! What a burning desire for heavenly, most pure, eternal delights! The tongue cannot speak of that blessedness whereof you taste, having God in your heart! With Him everything earthly is dust and decay."

John of Kronstadt: Saint of Communion, Saint of Confession

by Bishop Kallistos (Ware) of Diokleia

In the Epistle (1 John 4:7-11) and the Gospel (Luke 6:31-36) that are read in honor of St. John of Kronstadt, we notice the emphasis upon love. Our Holy Father St. John of Kronstadt, Wonderworker of all Russia, is an example to us of loving compassion, of pastoral love. In the Gospel in particular, the Lord emphasizes that our love should not simply be towards the people that we find congenial, not just towards those who show love towards us. It is to be far wider, we are to love our enemies, we are to love all our fellow humans, our love is to be without limits.

It is very clear that when St. John in his Epistle and our Savior in the Gospel speak about love they do not just mean something sentimental, something emotional, they mean something far more profound. The kind of love that



they envisage, a universal all-embracing love, a love without limits, can only be a result of prayer, of ascetic effort. Such love is something for which we must struggle and suffer. Such love cannot be based just upon our emotional feelings, it has got to have a deeper basis.

What is this deeper basis? It is precisely the service that we are celebrating together now, the service of the Holy Eucharist, which is indeed a sacrament of mutual love. Our love has its foundation and inspiration in the Divine Liturgy. If we are to show more vividly the kind of love of which the apostle John and our Lord speak, that can only come first and foremost through a deeper experience of Holy Communion, through frequent Communion received after profound and searching preparation.

St. John of Kronstadt was above all a Eucharistic Priest. He put The Holy Liturgy at the center of his life, and this was the source that enabled him to show such a dynamic and universal love. Our receiving of Holy Communion, while it is with the blessing of our spiritual father to be frequent, should never be mechanical or automatic. We are to prepare. And how should we do it? We are to prepare above all through the use of the sacrament of Confession.

Here there are as we know different disciplines. Some have been brought up to go to confession before every Communion, others have a blessing from their spiritual father to go more frequently to Communion without confession every time. But undoubtedly in our Eucharistic experience the sacrament of healing which we call Confession or the sacrament of repentance plays a central part.

Why do we need to go to confession? Is it not enough to confess our sins with sincerity in our private prayers each evening, will not God forgive us from the very moment that we confess our sins? Yes, as soon as we turn to God in true repentance He forgives us. God is always more ready to forgive than we to repent. Even the slightest turning of our heart will be blessed by God. Why then are we taught also to go to the sacrament of confession? I can think of three reasons certainly, perhaps you can think of more.

First of all there are no private sins, all sins affect our brothers and sisters in Christ. All of our sins, however secret, have an effect on the community. If I feel in my heart anger towards someone else, even if I do not show it by word or action, that evil disposition in my heart has a destructive effect on others around. Every sin is a sin against the community, every sin however secret is a stumbling block for others and makes it harder for them to serve Christ.

In the early Church confession was public. After the fourth century, with the growth of the Christian community, that gave scandal and so confession assumed its present form, as an opening of the heart before the priest alone, under conditions of secrecy. But let us remember that during confession the priest is there, among other things, as the representative of the community, of the people. The fact that we confess not just to God, but in the presence of a fellow man, shows that we acknowledge the communal social dimension of all our sins. In confessing in his presence we are also asking forgiveness from the community. I heard a story once told about St. John Maximovitch of Shanghai and San Francisco. I have also heard it told of others, but the same thing can happen more than once.

Once before the Divine Liturgy he was hearing the confession of a man, and the man said: "Yes I know that what I have done is a sin, I ask God's forgiveness, but my heart is like a stone, I do not feel any sorrow for my sin, it is all just in my brain." So St. John said to him: "Go out into the center of the church in front of the people and make a prostration before them and then come back to me." As the man did this and knelt to ask forgiveness from the people before him, something broke inside his heart and it came alive again. Suddenly he felt real compunction for what he had done. He said "now it is different," and the Archbishop gave him forgiveness.

That was the moment of turning for him because he acknowledged that his sin was a sin against the community and he asked their forgiveness. So in our confession let us first of all recall that dimension. We are also asking for forgiveness of our brothers and sisters for what we have done. That is one reason to go to confession, because sin is social.

There is a second reason. The spoken word, the uttered word has great force. This applies in two ways. First of all we listen to the spoken word of the priest, the council that he gives, and it may be that what he says if written down and put in a book would not seem so striking. It may be that it wouldn't seem so remarkable.

But in confession the priest is praying and we are praying for the light of the Holy Spirit, and he is addressing those words under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to each one of us, to each penitent personally. The words which looked at in the abstract might seem obvious, common place, can prove words of fire when we realize that they are being said to me personally here and now under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

I can remember at the Russian convent in London many years ago there was a priest, Fr. John, who didn't much like hearing confessions, he didn't much like giving sermons either. He was a person of few words and very humble, and didn't feel he really had the authority to offer council in confession, but he was blessed by the bishop to hear confessions so he did so. On one occasion a woman was telling him at immense length of her quarrels with her husband: "I said this and he said this and I told him he was wrong and told him this" and so it went on "and I told him this and this." When she had finally stopped all Fr. John did was to turn to her and say "And did it help?" and then he gave her absolution.

That came as a sudden revelation to her, the futility of the endless arguments she had with her husband, of her endless desire to prove that she was right and that he was wrong. Suddenly she saw that there was no point to all this, it was quite simply unnecessary and she stopped from that moment.

So the uttered word can have great power and that applies also to what you or I utter when we make our confession. Yes we can confess our sins secretly in our evening prayers and we should do so, but when we come before the holy icons in church, when we have listened to the prayers and speak in the presence of the priest, when we have to say these things aloud, often then it becomes powerful, immediate, personally significant in a way it was not before.

The uttered word has great force and we find ourselves in confession, by God's grace, saying things that we never said in our private prayers. Suddenly we are able to understand more deeply and to express it more openly. Therein lies much of the grace

of confession. The desert fathers say that a thought which is concealed has great power over us, but if we can find a way to bring it into the open and to speak of it, it loses its power. That is also what the modern psychiatrists tell us, but the desert fathers said it first! So, the uttered word that we bring in confession can have a sacramental force and a healing grace which will surprise us.

But then there is a third thing, not just what the priest does when he offers advice, not just what we do when we try to speak the truth in Christ. There is also what Christ does. Confession is a mystery of the Church that confers sacramental grace, there is power within it, Divine power. When the priest lays his hand upon our head in Confession, it is Christ who lays his hand upon us, Christ who forgives and that is certainly the deepest and most profound reason why we should go to Confession. When such grace and such healing is offered to us, who among us dare refuse to accept such an opportunity.

Bishop Kallistos Ware is Spalding Lecturer of Eastern Orthodox Studies at the University of Oxford. The author of many books and translations, he is perhaps best known for The Orthodox Church, the most recent revision of which was published by Penguin Books in 1993, and The Orthodox Way, recently issued in a revised edition by St. Vladimir's Seminary Press. He is a member of the advisory board of the Orthodox Peace Fellowship. His sermon was given at the parish of St. John of Kronstadt in Bath, England, the town in which he grew up.

From the September 1998 issue of *In Communion*, quarterly journal of the Orthodox Peace Fellowship

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Poem written by St. John of Kronstadt:

The Heart Can Change Several Times In One Moment

The heart can change several times in one moment

-to good or evil,

to faith or unbelief,

to simplicity or cunning,

to love or hatred,

to benevolence or envy,
to generosity or avarice,
O, what inconstancy!
O, how many dangers!
O, how sober and watchful we must be!

Rest of St John of Kronstadt

Troparion - Tone 1

As a zealous advocate of the Orthodox faith,
As a caring Solicitor for the land of Russia,
Faithful to the rules and image of a pastor,
Preaching repentance and life in Christ,
An awesome servant and administer of God's sacraments,
A daring intercessor for people's sake,
O Good and righteous Father John,
Healer and wonderful miracle-worker,
The praise of the town of Kronstadt
And decoration of our Church,
Beseech the All-Merciful God
To reconcile the world and to save our souls!

Troparion - Tone 4

With the apostles your message has gone out to the ends of the world,
And with the confessors you suffered for Christ!
You are like the hierarchs through your preaching of the word;
With the righteous you are radiant with the grace of God.
The Lord has exalted your humility above the heavens
And given us your name as a source of miracles.
O wonder-worker, living in Christ for ever,
Have mercy on those beset by troubles;
And hear us when we cry out in faith, O our beloved shepherd John!

Kontakion - Tone 3

This day the pastor of Kronstadt
Appears before the throne of God
Praying fervently on behalf of the faithful
To the chief pastor Christ, who has promised:
"I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail
against it!"

Holy Saint John, Pray Unto GOD For Us!

