

According to the Holy Fathers, the spiritual life consists of 3 stages; Purification, illumination, deification. Today we celebrate the memory of those who achieved deification ; the Saints. They overcame the fall of Adam and Eve so that they were again as God created man and then attained oneness with God. That is what it is to be Holy, whole, no longer split, but with only one desire, one purpose, and that purpose is to be with God.

Man can only travel this whole way if he has the Holy Spirit in him. When he has acquired the Holy Spirit, and there obtains the strength and inspiration he needs to walk this path. That is why the Sunday of the Saints comes immediately after Pentecost.

We will have to overcome death, the death of God in our thinking and feeling. We don't do that ourselves; that is what Christ does in us , He conquers death ; He raises God up in us again. And then He gives us the Holy Spirit , the Church , with a capital C , to give us the strength to walk this difficult path.

In the Holy Gospel , which He has given us , among other things , for inspiration , it says ; "As the father sent me, so send I you" and "Whoever loves me, take up his cross and follow me". And then He sends us the Holy Spirit to do this. The Saints we remember today have indeed done so, they have overcome death by acquiring the Holy Spirit. Their love for God was so great that they could set everything else aside.

We are all called to become Holy. God wants every man he has created to return to him . It's not that we'd have some kind of handicap that wouldn't make this possible. But we are hindered by having other loves as well, and also maintain, serve those other loves, and are being drawn away from that one true love, the Love of God.

The Saints have also experienced all this but have overcome that urge to follow other loves. The Saints have preceded us in that struggle , they are our example , our inspiration . That's why we read the Holy Lives, that's why we delve into what their lives have been, so that we can get a picture of what is required to approach God. They achieved their goal, deification, not by their special character, though they often had, nor by their special qualities or by a great deal of knowledge, but by the Holy Spirit. By purifying their hearts, the Holy Spirit became available to them. Hence the fathers emphasize that the spiritual life begins with the purification of our hearts.

And although the Saints are no longer alive with us, they are with us in the Church. For the Church is one, in heaven and on earth. On earth she is called the Church Militant, that is us, who struggle to overcome the urge for other loves, and in heaven she is called the Church Triumphant, because of the victory over death, the death of God in the heart. But it remains one Church, we are with the Saints in one and the same Church. And they are present here, like the Holy Angels, and celebrate with us the Holy Liturgy. Never forget that; that You are here in the company of the Saints. The icons here are a reflection of that.

The Saints are given to us because we need them. In the Saints we see Christ , He shines through their lives and enlightens us . By venerating the Saints, we venerate Christ.