

## Notes from the Semon on Sunday, October 9, 2022

### ***St. Tikhon, Patriarch of Moscow and Enlightener and Apostle to America: The Church as a Shelter from the Storm***

When we speak of the history of our Orthodox Church in America it's important to begin in Alaska. Owned by Russia until 1867, the Orthodox Church sent clergy to care for the spiritual needs of its citizens working in Alaska and to provide a missionary witness to the native people. The success of their missionary effort can still be experienced today as one can visit Alaska and attend Orthodox services in remote villages, served in the native language of the indigenous people. Eventually, upon the sale of Alaska to the United States the administrative presence of the Orthodox Church moved from Sitka, to San Francisco, and eventually to New York.

While we began as a missionary Diocese of the Russian Church, in 1970 we were granted the ability to govern ourselves which is called, "autocephaly." In other words, unlike every other Orthodox jurisdiction, all the leadership of our Church – Metropolitan Tikhon and the other bishops – all our seminaries, and all decisions are locally-based and we are not subject to any foreign authorities or influences.



At the end of every Divine Liturgy, I remember among the saints the “Wonderworkers and Enlighteners of North America.” Today, I want to speak of three of them: St. Herman, St. Innocent, and particularly focus on, St. Tikhon.”

- 1) **ST. HERMAN** came with the original group of missionaries that were sent from the Monastery of Valaam and arrived at Kodiak Island in 1794. He was not a priest, but while he cared for the spiritual needs of the Russians who had come to work in Alaska, he is primarily recognized for his care, respect, and defense of the native Alaska people that he came to know in the area of Kodiak and Spruce Islands. He is especially known for his words on the icon above from our iconostasis:

“From this day forth, from this hour, and from this minute let us love God above all.”

- 2) **ST. INNOCENT** - came from Russia as a married priest with family and arrived at Unalaska on July 29, 1824. Upon his wife’s death, he became a monastic and then was consecrated as the Alaskan Diocesan bishop. He has been called a “renaissance man” by some. He was a master carpenter, watchmaker, inventor, linguist, original translator, noted ethnographer, sociologist, teacher, and scholar. He understood the need to preach the Gospel and educate people in their native languages. He learned several of them and helped in the translation process, realizing that the essential missionary function of the Church is to translate the message of Jesus Christ in ways that are comprehensible to each person - wherever they live and whatever is their background.

When later asked about what the sale of Alaska to the United States, he replied: “I see in this event one of the ways of Providence by which Orthodoxy will penetrate the United States.” He recommended that the residence of the bishop should be San Francisco (rather than Sitka), that the new bishop and clergy should know English, that converts should be welcomed among the clergy, and that English should be used in worship.

- 3) **ST. TIKHON** - grew up in Russia and eventually served as a teacher and was consecrated as a bishop. He was recognized for his humility and love for those under his care. While serving as a bishop in the Polish area of Kolm and Lublin, one priest noted in his journal that: “For the first time I see a human being as a hierarch.”

He served as the head of the American mission between 1898-1907 and sought to unite the various Orthodox ethnic jurisdictions, being directly involved in the formation of St. Nicholas Church in Brooklyn which served Arabic Orthodox Christians and was there for its consecration and of the Arabic Bishop Raphael - who would later also be consecrated. He maintained good relations with the leadership of the Episcopalian Church.

He promoted the translation of the services into English and consecrated St. Tikhon’s Monastery.

In his final Sermon to his beloved American Church, delivered on the Sunday of Orthodoxy, 1907, he stated:

**“It is not a coincidence that the Church is likened to a ship, sailing amidst a ferocious, stormy sea that is ready to drown it in its waves. And the further the ship sails, the harder**

**the waves slam against it, the fiercer they attack it! But the harder the waves hit the ship, the further they are thrown away and rejoin the abyss and disappear in it, and the ship continues its triumphant sailing as before.”**

Little did he realize, that eventually upon his return to Russia he would experience the full reality of the Church’s place in the storm that he described.

In 1917, at the time of the Russian Revolution he was the Metropolitan of Moscow, and became during these early tumultuous moments the first Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church since 1700 when it was eliminated by Peter the Great.

He faced the challenging struggles of church closures, and the persecution and murder of many clergy and lay people. In addition, the Soviet government set up for a time a rival administrative body known as, “The Living Church,” which caused additional confusion.

Broken physically, he never gave up on his affirmation that the Church must be a ship of a “ferocious, stormy sea that is ready to drown it in its waves.”

He died in 1925 under suspicious circumstances and was canonized in 1989/

In Sunday’s Gospel I read the following text which was assigned for this day of remembering him and though Jesus is speaking about himself, we recognize St. Tikhon in his description of a hierarch and leader as a “door, a good shepherd, as one who knows his sheep and is known by them, and as one who will lay down his life for the sheep.”

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### **John 10:9-16 (Gospel, St. Tikhon)**

9

I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.

10

The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.

11

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.

12

But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them.

13

The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep.

14

I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own.

15

As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep.

And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd.

**CONCLUSION:** Each time we remember the Wonderworkers and Enlighteners of North America we consider through the examples of their lives – the essential affirmations on the place and function of our Church in America.

In **St. Herman**, as we recognize his call to “love God above all,” we see it worked out in the love for all of those God has placed in our midst – both to those we already know and love and in particular to the “least of the brothers and sisters.”

With **St. Innocent**, we hear the need that the Church in every generation be prepared to translate and make available the saving message and words of and about Jesus Christ in the ways that are most appropriate.

Finally, in celebrating the memory of St. Tikhon today – the date of his canonization – we realize the nature of the Church as not expressed in power, but in the authority of loving humility. We also recognize in St. Tikhon’s words the need for the Church to be a saving “shelter” from the storms of life that each of us have or will face.