

THE HOLY TEMPLE - HOLY HOUSE OF GOD
(25/10/2020)

At the beginning of the Divine Liturgy and other Holy Services, after the prayers for peace (which we spoke about in our previous sermons), we say this prayer: "***For this holy house and for those who enter it with faith, reverence, and the fear of God, let us pray to the Lord***" (The Great Litany, 3rd petition).

The fact that the Church gives such emphasis to this request and invites the faithful to pray for the "holy house" of God, shows how important the holy church (Temple) is in the life of every Christian. The holy house of God is the sacred place where His children come together to connect with the Heavenly Father, and worship Him. It is there that God listens to all of His children, and where they can rest from their troubles, pains, and sorrows.

Our Lord Jesus Christ speaks throughout time: "*Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*" (Matthew 11:28). Not only are His holy churches a place of rest, but with the Scripture Readings and heavenly Sermons, He teaches the faithful, guiding them safely through their lives. With the Communion of His Holy Body and Blood (as well as the other Sacred Mysteries) He unites them, sanctifies them, and strengthens them for their daily struggles. In this, the lives of the faithful are totally linked to the House of God. They are reborn with Holy Baptism, crowned and united in the bonds of Marriage (for couples), and receive the blessing of God to begin their new lives. Until the day of their departure for Heaven, the faithful have the church as a refuge for all their spiritual needs.

This is why Orthodox Christians love and honor the holy churches. Where a new parish community is forming, all members are involved in its growth. They contribute to the construction of the church, by equipping it with what it needs: sacred icons, candles, holy utensils and the like. If their church is old, they are constantly taking care to renovate it and ensure continual operation. Parishioners also supply the proper necessities for serving the Divine Liturgy, whether it is the "prosphoron" (bread), "nama" (wine), incense, oil for candles, and everything else. They willingly contribute support (large or small, depending on their capabilities) for the maintenance costs of each church.

For those faithful who surround the holy church with their practical love, helping and sacrificing in order to keep them clean and decent, the Church offers special prayers everyday (morning and afternoon). One of them is: "*Sanctify those who love the beauty of your house. Glorify them in return by Your divine power...*" (Prayer of the 2nd Antiphon and the Dismissal Prayer of the Divine Liturgy). How great it is for Christians, who for their humble offerings receive holiness from God, and the blessing of His divine glory and power! The Church never stops praying for those who contributed to the building of the churches, or the people who continue to support them over time. This is true even of these Christians who have since reposed: "*Let us again pray for the blessed and ever-memorable founders of this holy church...*" (Ektenia (Litany) of the Divine Liturgy, Vespers, and Matins). Once people fully understand what this means, they rush to do all that is possible to make these offerings, for the strength of our churches.

One serious reason why the Church prays for the holy houses of God to be kept safe forever is that sometimes there are dangers, as we know. There are people who want to harm the Orthodox

Church, and there have been attacks. How many churches have been bombed, set on fire or demolished under various pretexts?

The loss of the parish church is a great blow to the spiritual-liturgical life of the faithful! This was especially felt by Christians around the world in recent days, when due to coronavirus, they could not go to church even on Pascha. That was only for a few months, but we can see the severe test Christians face if they are deprived of their churches for a long time.

My brothers and sisters, let us surround our parish church with love, and be devoted to it. Each time the Priest says the prayer "*For this holy house ...*", or the Prayer: "*Lord ,our God... look upon us and upon this holy house in Your compassion...*", may we affirm these requests with all the power of our souls.

When the Divine Liturgy does end, let us sing the following hymn with joy, faith and a warm heart: "*For as much as You have shown forth the splendor of the firmament on high and the beauty of the holy habitation of Your glory here below, O Lord:*

**"The church is a multi-illuminated heaven,
which enlightens all the faithful.**

As we are standing in it, we cry out:

O Lord, secure, (strengthen) this holy House"