

## He Who Was Among Us (In Memory of Blessed Metropolitan Antony Khrapovitsky, +8/10/36) - St. Justin (Popovich)

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The Most Blessed Metropolitan Antony passed into the other world prayerfully and peacefully. He was not of this world but belonged entirely to that other world, even while he was in this world. He walked upon this earth but his inner life was concealed with Christ in God. He contemplated on what was above, and by heavenly means he measured what was earthly, and what was temporary; he evaluated in comparison with the eternal. Death has uncovered the reliquary of his body, and he has joyously been translated into the heavenly realm, eternal and not made by hands. It was only for this that he dreamt. For he lived in this life like a traveller who, while crossing this world, hastens to his eternal homeland, to the heavenly realm in which the sun is Christ, radiating truth and love, shining without setting or being extinguished. If anyone in this world always lived in unity with all the saints (Hb.3:i8), it was assuredly this Most Blessed Metropolitan. He was always in holy "community" which is nourished by prayer, love and faith. This is his sacred amity in which, with pious, tireless sensitivity and prayerfulness, he associated with the holy fathers, contemplating them, speaking from them. He belonged to them with his whole soul and whole heart; it was with their eyes that he gazed upon this world. In unity with them, he lived in this world and thus he was mighty in the patristic faith, in deeds, in life itself. And now he is with them and amongst them. There can be no doubt that his soul now joyously makes prostrations before St. Chrysostom, St. Basil, before

St. Gregory and the rest of the hierarch-saints. He makes such prostrations while praying for all of us, his children.

A martyr — by his death he joined the martyrs. Was he not a martyr? He who burdened himself with severe moral struggle? Yet in the dawn of his monasticism he tormented himself with Christ's suffering, day and night placing upon himself the labours of fasting, prayer, tears, meekness, almsgiving, love, love of one's neighbor, love of God. Truly a martyr, for he exhausted his body and subjected his soul to ascetic labours, restraining from everything worldly to attain the wondrous kingdom of his Lord Jesus Christ.

A confessor — by his death he joined the confessors. Seldom in our age has anyone proclaimed the Gospel truth with

such fearless confession. His divinely wise voice rang out not only in the vastness of Russia. It sounded forth with its life-creating strength resurrecting dead souls, comforting those who sorrowed; it laid low those who fought against Christ, and silenced the lips of the evil-minded. Fearlessly, he strode toward Christ's truth by the most direct path. With apostolic courage and daring he defended the Orthodox Church before the powerful of this age. And he did so at the price of heavy sufferings. But in all these sufferings he was kind and peaceful, as according to the Apostle, 'Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong. (2 Cor 12:10) Nothing could force him to silence or even deter, his Pauline eloquent zeal for Orthodoxy.

Unmercenary — through death he united with the holy unmercenaries. For, who was so generous as he? Who else was as tenderly merciful? Who, if not he, was so evangelical a co-sufferer? Truly, seldom has anyone so decisively, so sincerely and so firmly come to love poverty for Christ's sake. All that he had belonged to everyone. I am certain that after his death he left no money and no possessions aside from some books and a donated cassock.

Unmercenary, he fed the spiritually hungry as well as their bodies. No one who ever spent a few moments with him left without being consoled, inspired, reassured. From him a stream of grace flowed unseen into the souls of those who conversed with him. Whether he spoke, or kept silent, or smiled upon us, he miraculously acted upon us, and often he stirred up a trembling in your entire being.

An ascetic — through death he united with the holy ascetics. Together with the holy ascetics he perceived and understood Christianity as a moral struggle, a struggle by which a person is transformed into an eternal, deified being. Our Most Blessed Abba Antony was a leader and guide for us. There is nothing lifeless, nothing scholastic in his perception and understanding of Christianity, while all round, in rationalistic and scholastic Europe, the dead are burying their own dead. The blessed Abba received every commandment of the Saviour as a calling to struggle, and all the commandments together as an incarnate asceticism. Indeed, not a single word of the Saviour, not a single commandment of the Saviour can be fulfilled without effort, without labour, without struggle. Thus, it is said: The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force. (Mt. 11:12) and our Most Blessed Metropolitan was always engaged in a labour of evangelical toil. He turned his ascetic life into a sermon: the Gospel is a moral struggle, Christianity is a moral struggle. This great metropolitan, from beginning to end, was a tireless ascetic, filled with prayer, tender mercy, tears, love, forgiveness, all-encompassing love.

A man of prayer — by death he joined the saints of prayer. Truly, our Blessed Vladyka lived by prayer on earth. It could not have been otherwise. The one who is most faithful to

the Gospel on earth is, at the same time, the most prayerful. This is so because he is sensitive to the measureless tragedy of life, which arises from that sinfulness and evil which have arisen in this world.

An evangelical person is aware with his whole being that only the Almighty Lord can destroy wickedness and the devil from among mankind. In the evangelical soul of our blessed metropolitan, every person called forth prayer from his heart. He treated everything prayerfully. Thousands and millions of human beings perish in the sea of life, being tossed about by the storms of evil. How could this visionary metropolitan not cry out with unceasing prayer and not call for the help the One Who alone can save us from the evil-one, from sin? A true Christian inevitably is a true praying person. If he has any kind of a calling, then here is his calling both in this world and the one that is to come.

And what now? Now, over our sorrowful world, there is yet another martyr amongst the holy martyrs. Yet another unmercenary amongst the holy unmercenaries, yet another ascetic amongst the holy ascetics, yet another one of holy prayer amongst the holy-ones of prayer. And this means that there has increased the number of eternally vigilant and untiring holy ones praying for our bitter world. Thus our grief over the departure of our Most Blessed Metropolitan Antony turns into joy, for now he will love us even more strongly, even more will he help us, even more sincerely will he support us on the Gospel path, even more penetratingly will he lead us through the darkness of this world into the azure splendor of the Saviour's wondrous eternity.

O Lord All-Merciful, have mercy on us by the prayers of our father, Blessed Metropolitan Antony.