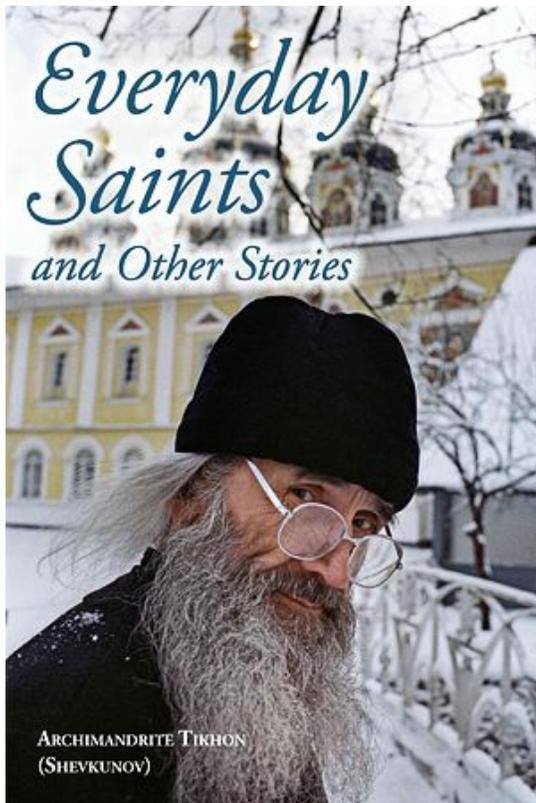


Everyday Saints: A Book Review

This weekly bulletin insert complements the curriculum published by the Department of Christian Education of the Orthodox Church in America. This and many other Christian Education resources are available at <http://dce.oca.org>.



Two saints from widely different periods of history are sometimes celebrated together.

The first is the Hieromartyr Ignatius, who is traditionally understood to have been the child who was held in the arms of Jesus Christ when He "took a child and set it among them, saying, 'Whosoever shall humble himself as this little child, the same is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven'" (Matthew 18: 4). He grew up to become a bishop, and introduced antiphonal singing in the Church. Later he gave his life for the faith in the Roman arena.

The second is Saint John of Kronstadt, whose life began in the late 19th century and continued into the 20th. A miracle worker, teacher and priest who became known and admired all over the world, Saint John spent much of his time helping the poorest and most humble people.

These two men remind us that there have been people in every age who give exceptional service to God. A new book offers stories about monks of our own day who serve Him in the Pskov Caves Monastery, in northwestern Russia. It is called "Everyday Saints" (Pokrov Publications, 2012).

The collected stories reflect the varied personalities and experiences of the monks (there is also a chapter about Mother Frosya, an extraordinary nun) and give the reader insight into the way monastics live. Some of them lead quite solitary lives; others interact with children and families who have some association with the monastery. But all of them make the daily effort to live in obedience, humility and love.

Among them is Abbot Alipius, a highly decorated and courageous veteran of World War II. He was never intimidated by the persistent efforts of the Soviet government to harass the monks and shut down the monastery. When "government visitors" arrived, he would greet them courteously, but would also remind them that most of the monks were hardened war veterans who didn't give in to threats.

He once told some officials that the only way to close the monastery would be for them to bomb it, adding that if they did so, he would make sure the news went all over the world via the Voice of America. Then he told them simply, "Well, it's up to you." If it was a bluff, it sufficed to make the officials unsure of what this "crazy monk" might be capable of, and they left the monastery, at least for the moment, in peace.

Despite such confrontations, Abbot Alipius felt Christ-like love for every person. He said, "You may object to me that it is impossible to love your enemies. But remember what Jesus Christ told us: 'Whatever you have done to the least of these my brethren you have done to Me...!' Inscribe these words in golden letters upon the tablets of your heart, and...read them to yourself every day."

There are many more memorable people and inspiring words to discover in the pages of this profusely-illustrated book. It is a literary and spiritual treasure chest.