

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

I greet all of you with joy on the occasion of the patronal feast of our cathedral, the feast of St. Nicholas the Wonderworker.

Saint Nicholas is known the world over; in some ways, he is the archetypal saint. He is known for his love, for his generosity, for his care for the poor, for his zeal for the true faith of Jesus Christ.

But among Orthodox Christians, he is known above all for his wonders—his miracles, worked in the power of the Holy Spirit. This is why he is one of just a few saints whom we regularly call by the title wonderworker, *thaumaturgus* (or *thavmaturgos*), *chudotvoret*s.

Indeed, look at any medieval life of Saint Nicholas and this will become immediately apparent: they are filled with stories of miracles worked during the saint's life and after his repose.

For example, there exists a medieval Russian manuscript life of St. Nicholas that is lavishly illustrated. Running to 255 manuscript pages (that is, the equivalent of over 500 pages in a modern book), with 448 illustrations, this life is an unparalleled testimony to the love of the Orthodox Christian people for St. Nicholas. And almost the entire text of the life, and most of its major illustrations, are connected with St. Nicholas' miracles.

Likewise, the hymns for the feast of St. Nicholas are filled with references to his wonderworking power and our hope that he would assist us with this great gift of miracles that he has received from God.

But for us modern-day people, all of this can seem a bit embarrassing, a bit over the top, a bit medieval, a bit superstitious. We often retreat from talk of wonderworking saints and icons and relics; we may want to convince ourselves that we see things in a more refined and spiritual manner.

After all, counting on St. Nicholas to help us with this or that problem, this or that illness, can seem superficially worldly. More than that, we know better than our medieval forefathers—we have doctors for sicknesses, social services for our poor, and a whole bevy of self-improvement techniques and therapies for our own shortcomings.

And it is true that we have all of those things, and for the most part, we are grateful to God for them. We are glad we have modern medicine; we are happy to have some sort of social safety net; we are glad to find wisdom for living wherever it may be found, always rejoicing in what is good and true and beautiful.

And yet, with all that said, we should affirm that to believe in St. Nicholas' wonderworking power, to celebrate him as a wonderworker—this is not to embrace superstition, but rather to embrace some of the most fundamental truths of the Gospel, some of the most fundamental truths of the world.

First, belief in miracles is basically a belief that God is a living, active God, who is constantly engaged with his creation out of love, in accordance with the mysterious workings of his providence. Creation is not purely mechanistic, raw material that we can manipulate according to certain rules for certain outcomes. Creation is the product of God's love, and one of the means by which he reaches out to us in love.

And so, when we speak of St. Nicholas' power to work wonders, we are really affirming God's sovereignty over his creation, sovereignty that he, in his love, has chosen to exercise in, through, and together with his saints.

Second, when we celebrate St. Nicholas as a wonderworker, and when we actually approach him in prayer, asking for his intercessions in our trials and sicknesses and difficulties, we are acknowledging our reliance on the Lord. 'Without me ye can do nothing,' teaches Jesus our Master and God.

Yes, we have modern medicine and services and psychology, but we still acknowledge that good outcomes are not based on human artifice alone: in everything we rely on divine grace and acknowledge that God's will be done. God can work through doctors and he can work through St. Nicholas, and indeed, he can work through both at the same time. But reliance on worldly intervention alone can mislead us; reliance on the prayers of the saints, on the other hand, always points us back to God, from whom comes every good and perfect gift.

Third, by celebrating St. Nicholas as wonderworker, we are reminded never to lose hope. However great the achievements of science, technology, politics, economics, and the like may be, we all know that there are situations that seem to lie beyond human intervention. Medical emergencies, chronic illnesses, relationships of every kind, family and financial circumstances, natural disasters, political and geopolitical crises: in all of these areas we sometimes exhaust our human options.

But St. Nicholas reminds us that, with God, the options are never exhausted.

None of this is to say that, even as we celebrate St. Nicholas the Wonderworker, we can be assured of his wonders in any given circumstance. As I stated previously, our God is a living, active God who acts out of his mysterious providence: he knows everything about us, and everything we need, far better than we know ourselves.

But we know that, if we need a miracle, God can provide that miracle. And we know that he often chooses to do so through the prayers of his saints, especially Saint Nicholas, in whom the Lord delights and whom the Lord has chosen to glorify as his friend and holy one.

And so, on this feast day of St. Nicholas, I encourage everyone to turn to our great patron as a wonderworker, to celebrate him as one whom God has appointed to offer solutions that go beyond the merely mortal, beyond the merely human.

Amid all the troubles and difficulties of our life, we should avail ourselves of every virtuous and God-honored solution that lies in our power, but more than that, we should trust in God's providence and earnestly seek the prayers of his saints. Whether or not St. Nicholas works a miracle for us, whenever we turn to him in prayer, we will surely grow closer to him, and, through him, to Christ.

In his love for mankind, Christ our God has made St. Nicholas great: not just for the Middle Ages, not as a pious symbol, but as a living presence, a saint who is always with the people of God, praying for us, loving us, communicating to us the living and active love of the God whom he serves.

And so, on this great feast day, we offer St. Nicholas our love and veneration, and to the one God in Trinity we send up all glory, honor, and adoration, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.