

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

This Wednesday, September 11th, the Church remembers one of the minor holidays of the Church calendar, but one that is very important. This is the Beheading of St. John the Baptist. On this day, we are honoring the greatest of the prophets, who was a most strict faster, subsisting on a diet of locusts with wild honey and never drinking wine. Remembering his strictness in fasting, we are called also to strictly fast on this day, denying ourselves even seafood, but may drink wine in celebration of the holiday. Everyone of us with no exception should take and read the Gospel for the day which describes what happened. The Gospel reading is found in the St. Mark's Gospel, chapter 6, verses 14-30.

The beheading of St. John teaches us some very important spiritual and moral lessons. It teaches us about the dangers of drinking alcohol, behaving in a morally loose way and giving oaths. While it is not forbidden to drink alcohol, even acceptable in the right measure and on the right occasion, over-drinking damages our will so strongly that it could allow us to do evil things. Morally loose behavior, so acceptable to young people especially, will also often lead to our participating in very immoral activities as we lose control over ourselves. Finally, the Gospel teaches us that we should not give frivolous oaths because as Orthodox Christians, we should be so honest that we would not need to give oaths in order for people to believe in the truth of what we are saying. What a great blessing to be able to learn such very important lessons found in a single holiday!

Even though the holiday falls on a weekday, when most of us will need to be at work, this does not prevent us from at least attending the vigil on Tuesday evening to share this day with our most-holy saint. Also, everyone one of us should honor the holiness of our great saint by keeping the fast very strictly during this day. May God grant you the will and desire to do this and celebrate the holiday in a spiritually joyous way.

With Love in Christ,
Archpriest Serge Kotar