

**Bishop Marc homily on the feast of Saints
of the Celtic Orthodox Church
(June 2016)**

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

Today we are celebrating all the men and women saints, all the just of the Celtic Orthodox Church, because this is the nearest Sunday to the actual feastday which falls on June 14th. 150 years ago, a Metropolitan of the Syriac Orthodox Church consecrated one Jules Ferrette as Bishop Julius, thus making it possible for the ancient Celtic Church to recover its apostolic filiation. We will celebrate this 150th anniversary most solemnly on the 13th, 14th and 15th of August next, with conferences, concerts and obviously, liturgical offices.

Ours is a very ancient Church and it existed for more than 12 centuries. It was the last ancient non-Roman local Western Church that had resisted the Romano-Byzantine Empire's dominance.

Due to the ups and downs of history, most Eastern and Western Churches were encompassed within the Romano-Byzantine Empire. But because it was located on the farthest reaches of the West, the Celtic Orthodox Church remained outside the Empire's pale. Free from all geopolitical temptation, it continued to develop a form of Christianity centered on the life of Christ. Many Celtic—especially Irish—missionaries travelled throughout Europe and established numerous foundations.

It is estimated that the Irish and their disciples established more than 550 monastic foundations in Europe. Missionaries went as far as Kiev in the Ukraine and Taranto in Sicily. Celtic crosses are to be found in Denmark and Ireland. After the collapse of the Roman Empire in the 5th century, these Celtic missionaries re-christianized Europe from the 6th to the 8th centuries.

This Church was structured on a model different from that of other Churches. There were many big monasteries, some of which were inhabited by two to three thousand monks. Ireland was called the Isle of Saints. They are not to be compared to the great monasteries of Mount Athos or the Benedictines in the West, most of which, by the way, succeeded Irish foundations. Rather, they were big villages, where people lived a life in

Christ in a total, absolute way. And the one who reminded us what Celtic Christianity was like, who spoke of it with passion, who lived it in a holy life, is our father Saint Tugdual who, as you well know, founded the place where we are. I will read a few passages from his writings during this homily.

When we speak of the Celtic Orthodox Church, the word Celtic refers to the past, to the apostolic origin of our Church, to its roots. Saint Tugdual did not use the word Celtic to designate his Church. He used the word Celtia. He called it the “Holy Church in Celtia.” For him Celtia designated the country whose king was Christ. He even gave it a capital also called Celtia. It is the Kingdom, the true part of the new humanity in Christ. Ever since the Ascension, “the victorious Celtia”, as he called it—in other words the undivided Church, the Body of Christ—is seated at the right hand of the Father. Thus, henceforth all Christians participate in divine life.

For Saint Tugdual, what must interest the Christian of the Holy Church in Celtia is, he says, “Celtia, the new city, the capital of the resurrected Celtia toward which they hasten.” Celtia, therefore, is the true capital of the Celts of the resurrected Celtia, the capital from on-high—in other words, the restored Celtic Orthodox Church. Historically, the Celtic Church was “killed in its flesh,” according to Saint Tugdual’s expression, when it lost its sovereignty. But, he says, it “entered into ineffable glory.” For, “what is killed among men can only live for God! That is why the restoration and the resurrection of the glorious Church of the Celts can in no way be, and once more become, what was the historical and perishable Church; sown in corruptibility, it can only rise again today incorruptible.”

Consequently, since the Church is pure and incorruptible, the Celtic Christian has no fatherland here below. In one of his notebooks, meditating on the verse: “I beg of you as sojourners and pilgrims” in the First Epistle of Peter (chapter 2, verse 11), Saint Tugdual writes: “Do you want to be a perfect Christian in the manner of Celtia? Then you must be both strangers and travellers... However beautiful, however great, however welcoming may be the country where it is given to you to dwell, you keep the invincible nostalgia of your fatherland. Now for us Christians of Celtia it is not Wales, Cornwall, Britain or Brittany that are our true fatherlands. What we are looking for is the Celtia of on-high, the Eternal Celtia, the one that never passes; and until we reach it we groan in the sadness of exile among the nations.” If he addresses Celts in general, it is because they are the

descendants of their “glorious Church”. But in its essence it transcends race and culture.

Churches need structures, but most of the time they have confined themselves within their structures and declared that, in relationship to other Churches, they are the true Church of Christ. Today the ecumenical dialogue has fostered progress in the desire for communion. But for Saint Tugdual, only total abandonment to the absolute Love for God, in an “absolute Christianity”, as he put it, is the true road of return to the unity of the Churches in Christ’s sole undivided Church. This is the very reason for the restoration of the Celtic Orthodox Church. For, he says, “I, Tugdual, declare that if Christianity in Celtia were not to be absolute Christianity, it must be annihilated and disappear. At night and in the forest, at the beginning of the restoration, I experienced the glory of Celtia and I heard the desire of the Ancestors. That is why I cannot betray them or disappoint them in their just expectation, but I myself must accept absolute Christianity and urge many, many others to accept it.”

Saint Tugdual never stopped preaching that the important thing is to seek communion with the love of God, to receive it in our heart and live it in our relationship with our neighbor, because the world needs love. No system could ever save it from its chaos. We read in a recent press release that only ten countries in the world are not at war. This is a tragic thing to report. But isn’t it our vocation as Christians to bring Christ to the world by revealing His love? How can we reveal this love if we are not totally converted to it? All creation itself is in expectation of our conversion, as Saint Paul says in the 8th chapter of his Epistle to Romans. Saint Tugdual invites us, and I quote, “to spread all this Divine Love without letup, on all men, even more on all sinners—and we are all sinners—and on all creatures, animate or inanimate, animal, vegetal or mineral, visible or invisible.”

All the men and women saints and all the just of the Celtic Orthodox Church whom we are celebrating today have gone to the far corners of the world to bring Christ to men with the faith and fervor that they received as an ideal of revolutionary life! Why couldn’t this ideal flower again today? Do we want to be set ablaze with this love and transmit it to others in an absolute gift of ourselves as Our Lord Jesus did for us?

Saint Tugdual calls out to us vehemently: “The task of the zealous Missionaries of the new Celtia—he’s talking about us—is to announce

Jesus, the Christ. Jesus, at whose Name every knee bends in heaven, on earth, and in hell. Jesus, Who is anointed with an eternal unction. Jesus, Who is the only Great Druid possessing all wisdom and Knowledge, the only Master of Piety, the only Prince of Spirituality.

“To announce Jesus in season and out of season! To announce Jesus at all times, in all places, to all men and to all creatures! The zealous missionary of the Celts consists and will always consist in putting Jesus in the eyes, in the ears, in the nostrils, in the mouth, in the hands, in the feet, in the soul, in the body and in the heart of all men. Not only that, but also to announce Him to minerals, to plants, to birds, to fish, to animals, to the luminaries, to the sun, to the moon, to stars, to mountains, to hills, to plains, to steppes, to scrublands, to deserts, to valleys, to chasms, and to the caverns of the world. To announce Jesus morning, noon and night, at every hour, every minute and every second. To announce Jesus to spring, summer, fall, and winter. To announce Jesus to the light, to day and to night. To announce Jesus to the rain, snow, air, winds and hurricanes. To announce Jesus to the ocean and to the sea, to flowers, rivers and brooks. To announce Jesus throughout the earth and the sky. To announce Jesus [...] to the Angels, demons, all creatures visible and invisible, that’s what the zeal of Celtia consists in, otherwise it would not be the zeal of Celtia.”

Saint Tugdual never stops urgently inviting us to live this absolute. Do we want this flame to announce Christ to men and all creation? Does this faith dwell within us, or are we only preoccupied with our petty lives and petty human worries? Do we want to be the kind of torches and apostles that our fathers were? You have to earn the Christian name. It’s not a label; it’s a living reality, a witness to the world!

We are not celebrating this feast today only to remember that our Church was great, venerable and luminous, and that it shone brightly in the history of Europe by its many monasteries and missionaries. In His mercy God has willed its restoration because He is calling us to walk in their footsteps with all other Christians, whoever they may be, and once more become what our fathers were in their holiness, because this is what the world needs. If we do not receive the love that God gives, and which we must give to the world, it will sink into the indescribable chaos the signs of which we presently see. And we will bear part of the responsibility by refusing that to which we are called.

On this day, which is the 150th anniversary of the restoration of our Church, our Mother, let us plead with all the saints of paradise to awaken us and help us become conscious of the fact that this world will change because we will have decided to change our heart. For a heart filled with the love of God will burn to spread it throughout the entire world.