

SS. PETER & PAUL ORTHODOX CHURCH
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email: frjames@ssppoc.org

December 10, 2006

SUNDAY/DEC. 10th (Fish, wine & oil)
26th Sunday After Pentecost (Tone 1)
St. Ioasaph of Belgorod

- 9:10a.m. 3rd and 6th Hours
- 9:30a.m. Divine Liturgy; Coffee Hour
Church School (Young Class)
Teen Discussion
- 11:30a.m. Christmas Cookie Walk (Upper Hall)

MONDAY/DEC. 11th

- 6:30p.m. Memorial Service for Ann Kralovich
- 7:00p.m. Compline & Akathist to
St. Spyridon (Dec. 12th)
Confessions

TUESDAY/DEC. 12th (Wine & oil)

- 7:00p.m. Vespers; Confessions

WEDNESDAY/DEC. 13th (Fish, wine & oil)
St. Herman of Alaska

- 9:10a.m. 3rd and 6th Hours
- 9:30a.m. Divine Liturgy

THURSDAY/DEC. 14th (Wine & oil)

- 7:00p.m. Special Parish Council Meeting

SATURDAY/DEC. 16th (Fish, wine & oil)

- 9:30a.m. Akathist; Confessions
- 5:30p.m. Vigil; Confessions

SUNDAY/DEC. 17th (Fish, wine & oil)
Sunday of the Holy Forefathers (Tone 2)

St. Dionysius of Zakynthos

- 9:10a.m. 3rd and 6th Hours
- 9:30a.m. Divine Liturgy; Coffee Hour
Question & Answer Period

A Reflection on What We Are Praying For

It is important for a Christian to believe that God takes an interest in the most insignificant details of a person's life. However, God's action can be, and often is, limited by the individual concerned, to whom God has given the power to veto in the form of freedom.

Most people grow up thinking that there may be a God, but that His influence is either very, very small, or is held in reserve until something really important comes along. People may agonize over big decisions, and ask God to guide them in the choice of a spouse, a new job, or a new home. Strangely, too, we seem to assume that they are certain areas where the intervention of God would not be beneficial. We often try to interest God in a list of sick people and the world's political problems, but just as carefully we try to keep Him away from areas of sex or money.

Most prayers that start, "Dear God, please..." are not answered – at least, not in the most direct way. If they were, there would only be one religion, and everyone would belong to it. That would be a chaotic world in which the human ego with its bottomless desires would be king.

We tend to reserve prayer for big decisions, and then take the consequences, as if the outcome of the prayer did not matter at all.

The idea that prayer is the nature of the relationship that governs everything in a person's life, right down to the smallest detail, is an idea that needs to be assimilated. God is involved with the tiniest detail; each nuance, each thought, each feeling is available for the relationship with God to be made manifest.

- from "Steps of Transformation" by
Fr. Meletios Webber



The Mystery of Holy Confession

Is offered every Saturday evening after Vigil (7:30p.m.) and most Saturday mornings after the Akathist (10:00a.m.). You may also make arrangement with Fr. James for Confession at another time. Call or email Father James. Anyone wishing to receive Holy Communion on the Nativity Feast (Dec. 25th) must avail themselves of Confession in this 40 Day Lent.

The Parish Synodicon: Memory Eternal!

Dec. 11, 1961 Paul Romanovich
Dec. 12, 1976 Christian Swidonovich
Dec. 14, 1978 Pauline Jackowlew
Dec. 16, 1933 Vladimir Shultz
Dec. 16, 1993 Ann Warin
Dec. 18, 1980 Joseph Pituck

Helping A Mission Church to Grow

Christ the Savior Mission on Fenwick Is. In Delaware is six years old. To help them a little, we have agreed to sell their natural candles. A table is set up in the lower hall with a variety of candles and wax melt/tarts. Your offering may be placed in the basket on the table. For more information on the mission, see their website: www.orthodoxdelmarva.org. Fr. John Parsells is the Acting Rector.

December Month Envelopes are -3

Please be mindful that three offering envelopes have been dropped for this month – Christmas Flowers, Church School and Church Restoration Funding for them is now secured in the regular Sunday envelope. Be mindful of this in making your offerings.

Purchasing Religious Items

A limited number of religious items – books, icons, incense, etc. may be purchase at the vestibule stand. Please place the monies in an envelope and mark it “religious resale.” If you wish to see various catalogs offering religious items that may be ordered, please speak with Robert Smith.

The Parish Website: www.ssppoc.org

If there are cancellations of parish life activities due to weather or other reasons, they will be posted on the website at least 1 hour before the scheduled time. If in doubt about a scheduled church service or event, call the rectory to check the website.

Memory Eternal!

A former parishioner, Walter (Vladimir) Zamerovsky of Lakewood, NJ reposed on Dec. 3rd. May his memory be eternal! Our prayers and sympathy are expressed to his wife, Eileen and his two daughters, Nicole and Paula. Walter was a member of Holy Annunciation Church in Brick.

Offerings for the Week of Dec. 10th

Olive Oil - in memory of Emilia; in memory of Michael; for the health Liliana and Laurentiu and in thanksgiving.

Wine - in memory of William Warcola.

The Position of Choir Director

Will be discussed at a special meeting of the parish council, Thursday, Dec. 14th. After many years of faithful and honorable service, Matushka Daria will leave-off directing the choir at the end of this month. Our heartfelt appreciation is expressed. Until a new choir director is found, Deacon Paul and Diaconissia Patricia Sokol will cover the services. Any recommendations or suggestions in regard to this position may be addressed to Father James or any parish council member.





NATIVITY FAST GUIDELINES

| Days: | Abstinence of: | No Abstinence of: |
|---|--|--|
| Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday | Meat and Meat Products Dairy Products | Fish, Wine and Oil, Fruits and Vegetables |
| Wednesday, Friday | Meat and Meat Products Dairy Products Fish, Wine and Oil | Fruits and Vegetables |

A COMMENTARY ON PSLAM 118 by St. Theophan the Recluse

v. 18: O unveil mine eyes, and I shall perceive wondrous things out of Thy law.

From the time of his fall, man is blind and only when he comes nearer to God does he see. Yet in people who live with God there occurs a state of oblivion, when salutary and stimulating thoughts are carried away, one forgets who one is, where one goes, and what is to be expected. This is not always followed by great mistakes, however, the inner energy drops and the spiritual order is upset.

v. 19: I am a sojourner on the earth, hide not from me Thy commandments.

A wanderer strives for his goal, passing by, lingering nowhere. Yet, very often, men live as if they had to love on earth eternally. How can he not forget his eternal destination and not get too much embroiled in things of this world?

v. 20: My soul has longed to desire Thy judgments at all times.

In spite of all these wicked moods the soul longs to be with God. The will however is weakened and only the force of reason carries on. This is a stroke of the will by reluctance: one falls into a state of indolence towards any activity of the spirit.

Yours could be the world's most important job.

By supporting IOCC through your workplace giving campaign, you're helping to deliver nutritious lunches to school children, rebuild homes for refugee families, provide job training for widowed mothers and respond immediately when disasters strike. For just pennies a day, your pledge to IOCC through the Combined Federal Campaign (CFC) or United Way can make a significant difference for children and families across the world affected by poverty, war, disease and natural disasters.

Workplace Giving Code #0348

Or, on the campaign form, write in:

International Orthodox Christian Charities
P.O. Box 630225 • Baltimore, MD 21263-0225
Toll-free: (877) 803-4622 • www.iocc.org



INTERNATIONAL ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN CHARITIES

Make Christmas a True Feast

As Orthodox Christians, we celebrate the birth of our Savior as the "Feast of the Nativity" and exchange gifts with one another. For too many children though, Christmas will be just one more day to endure in a life of hardship. But your support of International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC) brings life-sustaining programs to children and families suffering from war, poverty, disease and natural disasters. This holiday season, make Christmas a true feast for thousands of children by giving to IOCC.

P.O. Box 630225
Baltimore, MD 21263-0225
Toll-Free: (877) 803-4622
Fax: (410) 243-9824
Internet: www.iocc.org



International Orthodox Christian Charities

A QUESTION ABOUT TITHING

Why does the Orthodox Church endorse tithing? The reason I ask this is that although 10% is required in Old Testament times, so is stoning for adultery and other rules we don't follow now. How do we tell what is valid today and what is not?

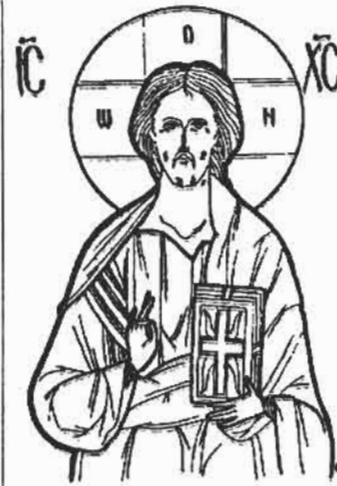
Tithing, as you correctly observe, is the Old Testament injunction to set aside 10% of all one possesses for the work of the Lord. Many Christians, Orthodox and non-Orthodox alike, strive to achieve this level of giving, even though its origin is in the Old Testament and there are those who would say that the New Testament maxim would be to recognize that all we possess is in fact the Lord's and that we should return to Him all that we have, or at least the first portion of our treasures.

Even though tithing is from the Old Testament, it should not be seen as something that should not be practiced, such as stoning. Would one also recommend that Christians ignore the Ten Commandments because they are found in the Old rather than New Testament? Jesus Christ came to fulfill the law, not to abolish it. That which was worth saving from the Old Covenant was incorporated into the New.

In looking at the reality of some of our parishes – especially those with 50 members or less – tithing might be a reasonable means of keeping the parishes properly funded and, in some cases, alive. The "I'll give a buck a week" attitude in a small parish will ensure that there are not enough funds to keep the doors open, much less support a priest.

The thing that is critical is not the percentage – or the origin of the maxim – but, rather, that one is giving the first and the best of one's resources to the work of the Church – in honesty and out of a sense of thanksgiving to God for His many blessings. Remember the widow who only gave two coins was blessed because she gave everything she had to God. She overshot the tithe by 90%!

Fr. John Matusiak



SCRIPTURAL REFERENCES

"Let each of you regularly on the first day of the week set aside a proportion as God has prospered him."

1 Corinthians 16:2

"What shall I render to the Lord for all He has given me?"

Psalm 116:12

"What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"

Matthew 16:26

DETERMINING YOUR WEEKLY OFFERING

| If Annual Gross Income Is: | 3% | 5% | 7% | 10% | 12% | 15% |
|----------------------------|------|------|-------|------------------|-------|-------|
| 20,000 | \$12 | \$19 | \$27 | \$38 | \$46 | \$58 |
| 30,000 | \$17 | \$29 | \$40 | \$58 | \$69 | \$87 |
| 40,000 | \$23 | \$38 | \$54 | \$77 | \$92 | \$115 |
| 50,000 | \$29 | \$48 | \$67 | \$96 | \$115 | \$144 |
| 60,000 | \$35 | \$58 | \$81 | \$115 | \$138 | \$173 |
| 75,000 | \$43 | \$72 | \$101 | \$144 | \$173 | \$216 |
| 100,000 | \$58 | \$96 | \$135 | \$192 | \$231 | \$288 |

All parishioners of Ss. Peter & Paul are encouraged to offer the tithe. If you are not already tithing, the beginning of the New Year of 2007 is a wonderful time to start.

Don't Pre-Celebrate Christmas!

The Advent Season, which began for us on November 15/28, is a time for anticipating the "Good News" of the Lord's Birth. As with all things in life, Scripture reminds us that we must be careful of being "in the world, but not of the world". This is especially true of the celebration of Christmas. Many lament that the stores are decorated for Christmas from the end of October — an example of the over-stressing and "early-stressing" of this great Christian Holy Day. But what do we do in our homes? I have noticed that on the Friday and Saturday after Thanksgiving, people begin to put up their decorations and turn on their Christmas lights and trees.

Our Orthodox Advent tradition gives us some guidelines of which many of us perhaps are not aware. Within this 40-day preparation period, a slow progression of events and remembrances unfolds. This is seen in the general attitude, hymnology, prayers, and fasting practices which begin to intensify on the Feast of St. Nicholas (December 6/19), and progress through the feasts of St. Spyridon (December 12/25), St. Daniel (December 17/30) and St. Ignatius (December 20/ January 2). The latter is specifically called "the day of preparation". What do you think this tells us?



Add to this the tradition of the "Twelve Days of Christmas" that begins on Christmas Day, and runs to January 5/18, the day before Theophany, the next great feast. The 'food fast' is most intense on the 12 days preceding December 25/January 7, and there is no fasting on the 12 days after Christmas, not even on a Wednesday or Friday! Again, what do you think this tells us?

It is interesting to note that historically we do not have an exact date of Jesus birth. The date of His Nativity was specifically selected by the early Church to coincide with the pagan celebrations held in late December. They were rather riotous and foolish in nature, not becoming of a follower of Christ. Thus this date had a dual purpose: (1) to mark the Lord's coming to earth in human form, and (2) to do it at a time which would help defeat an attitude and lifestyle which went against the Lord's teachings. The early Church leaders knew that these Christians struggled with the temptation to return to their former ways. Once again, what do you think this tells us?

The Orthodox tradition is clearly not to "pre-celebrate" Christmas, but rather to withhold the celebration until the designated time. Once it arrives, we are to celebrate it joyously, not with over riotous activity as did the pagans. Some 40 or 50 years ago here in America, people decorated their Christmas trees on Christmas Eve. Slowly, through the influence of merchants and media, we started to put up our decorations and trees earlier and earlier each year. As a result, we take them down earlier and earlier, not waiting for the Theophany observances of January 5-7 (January 18-20), which are specifically part of the 12-day cycle beginning on Christmas.

Every year there are more and more parties held during the height of the Christmas Fast, instead of during the festive period of December 25-January 5 [January 7-18]. On the day after Christmas we hear people say that Christmas is over, and the Christmas trees are out on the curb. Since they have pre-decorated and pre-celebrated and feasted, in their minds "it's over", when really it should just be beginning.

- ❑ Do decorate, but don't pre-decorate. Use the December 6-20 (December 19-January 2) guide as a starting point.
- ❑ Do celebrate, but don't pre-celebrate. Use the December 25-January 5 (January 7-18) time frame for your festivities.

The Scriptures instruct us: "In all things be not like the pagans, but rather calm, joyful in praise and giving of love to glorify Christ who came for us." Since we Christians are called to be "in the world, but not of the world", we are to transform the world and not have the secular world transform us. Secularism has crept into our Christmas observances. It is up to us as individuals to purify the celebration. This begins with our families, our households, doing the more proper and fitting things and teaching others to do likewise by example.

The Christmas tree

I suspect that the custom of decorating a tree at Christmas time is not simply a custom which came to us from the West and which we should replace with other more orthodox customs. To be sure, I have not gone into the history of the Christmas tree and where it originated, but I think that it is connected with the Christmas feast and its true meaning.

First, it is not unrelated to the prophecy of the Prophet Isaiah: "There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots" (Is. 11, 1). St. Cosmas the poet had this prophecy in mind when he wrote of Christ as the blossom which rose up out of the Virgin stem from the stump of Jesse. The root is Jesse, David's father, the rod is King David, the flower which came from the root and the rod is the Theotokos. And the fruit which came forth from the flower of the Panagia is Christ. Holy Scripture presents this wonderfully. Thus the Christmas tree can remind us of the genealogical tree of Christ as man, the love of God, but also the successive purifications of the Forefathers of Christ. At the top is the star which is the Godman Christ.

Then, the Christmas tree reminds us of the tree of knowledge as well as the tree of life, but especially the latter. It underlines clearly the truth that Christ is the tree of life and that we cannot live or fulfill the purpose of our existence unless we taste of this tree, "the producer of life". Christmas cannot be conceived without holy Communion. And of course as for Holy Communion it is not possible to partake of deification in Christ without having conquered the devil when we found ourselves faced with temptation relative to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, where our freedom is tried.

We rejoice and celebrate, because "the tree of life blossomed from the Virgin in the cave".



Saint John Chrysostom says that the Star of Bethlehem followed by the Wise Men was in fact not a star at all but some invisible power transformed into this appearance. Blessed Theophylact says that the star shone even in daylight. It moved when they moved and stopped when they stopped.