

Focus on the Faith

Why I Love Great Lent.

By Archpriest Basil Rhodes

Surely there must be something wrong with me. Nobody seems to think the way I do. Maybe I didn't get enough positive attention as a child, and settled for negative attention. Maybe I'm suffering from some horrible genetic defect which has caused me to be deathly allergic to meat, fish, milk, wine and olive oil. (Well, I actually am, now, allergic to most ocean going fish, but oddly, not shell fish.) Maybe I'm a masochist, a glutton for punishment, or maybe I'm just trying to talk myself into liking Great Lent, even though I secretly hate it? No. None of these is true. I genuinely look forward to Great Lent.

You see, the rest of the year seems to always get away from me. Oh, I try very hard to preserve and maintain the spiritual gains and insights which I gathered during the last Great Lent. I even make a mental pledge to myself, a kind of Bright Week Resolution, that I won't forget the spiritual Zion of the Great Fast. (May my kulich wither if I forget thee!) But I often feel like I've failed. I never seem to be able to maintain that hot zeal, that eager enthusiasm, like a race horse has during the race. It seems that once I've crossed the finish line of Pascha, my running stops, my straining forward is replaced by total relaxation. The "burden" of the Fast is quickly replaced by the flowery wreath of self-congratulations, and the feed-bag of victory is strapped on, seemingly 24/7.

While I, and we, must all be careful not to let ourselves slip too far into reckless hedonism, the fact is that it is our thinking, more than our actual "doing," that need to be re-focused. All is not lost. Believe me, if we allow this kind of thinking to capture our minds, we might

be tempted to fall headlong into despondency. We might begin to imagine that we are like the mythical Sisyphus, son of King Aeolus, and friend of Camus, ever struggling to ascend, but inevitably seeing all efforts come crashing down to earth.

No, Great Lent isn't like this, like being set up to fail. Not at all! The Forty Day Fast is like the treasure hunts I used to go on as a teenager. Up in the Sierra foothills, above my hometown, were a dozen or more Gold Rush rivers and their tributaries. Every summer a group of friends and myself would look forward to a new adventure in panning or sleuce-boxing, in search of the precious yellow stuff. The territory was always the same, always familiar. But the exact spots where we mined, varied each year. It was a lot of work, but we always believed that it was worth it. Some years we got quite a bit of gold. Some years we got very little. But we always got something. As long as we kept going back, we always returned with something valuable.

Great Lent is a lot like that. It is a search for the precious gold, the Pearl of Great Price, the lost Silver Coin, the widow's mites. Each year we come back. The territory is familiar, but how and where God enriches us, varies each time. The point is, we must keep coming back. We must not come back grumbling or frustrated. We must not come back feeling defeated or despondent. We need to return eager, and enthusiastic. Yes, we need to start loving Great Lent. It's time for the new adventure to begin. It's time for new opportunities to gather what is truly valuable. It's time to come back, knowing that while it will take a little work on our part, nonetheless we can expect something priceless in return!

...that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me. Riches and honour are with me; yea, enduring riches and righteousness. My fruit is better than gold, yea, than fine gold; and my yield is better than choice silver (Proverbs 8: 17-19.)

Orthopraxis

What is Orthodox Christian Stewardship?

By Archpriest Basil Rhodes

First Fruits

The Holy Scriptures speak of offering back to God the "*first fruits*" of our possessions, thus recognizing Him as the provider of all we are, and all we have. Stewardship is making Christ the first priority in the use of the time, talents and treasures He has given to us.

Return to God His Own Gifts

King David said, "*all things come from Thee, and of Thine own we have given to Thee.*" (Chronicles 29:14) Our money and possessions are not ours, but on loan from God. When we give to the Church, we return to God, the Owner, what is rightfully His.

Proportionate Giving

The more we are given, the more is expected of us. "*Everyone to whom much is given, from him will much be required.*" (Luke 12:48) Each Steward should determine what percentage of his other income will be committed to Christ and the Church for the year.

Cheerful Giving

"*Each person should give what he had decided in this heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful (willing) giver.*" (2 Corinthians 9:7) How do you compare your expenditure on personal entertainment – movies, music, television, games, and restaurants – to your giving for God's work? Our stewardship giving should resonate the words; "*We Praise, we Bless, we Worship Thee.*"

Your Support Enables our Ministry

Money is a necessary tool for ministry. To fulfill the Church's mission, we are called upon to commit our fair share for the financial support of our Church's expenses on a parish, diocesan, and National

level. Through Stewardship, let your particular Church "*become a reflection on earth of the glory of heaven*" (St. John Chrysostom.). *He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully* (2 Corinthians 9:6).

Being an active Orthodox Christian Steward is to believe in our Church. It means that we want to support and perpetuate her life and mission. It is one way that views the support of our Church as a matter of personal commitment and conscience. The financial support that we pledge for the year will be utilized to help meet our parish's total financial obligations toward its clergy, its programs and ministries.

Ministry Resources

The quality of our service as a parish, as an Orthodox Church community, depends directly on the level of your generous giving. We shouldn't have to depend on special fundraisers to meet our budget, for this is our direct responsibility. Stewardship places the responsibility on all of us, for we are the recipients of God's gifts and play an active role in perpetuating His work of salvation.

Private and Confidential

Your Stewardship Commitment is kept in confidence. Jesus taught us that giving should be done quietly, generously and out of sight of others. If you wish to revise your commitment during the year for any reason, you may send a note to the Priest or the Treasurer indicating your intention. Your pledge will be seen only by the Membership Secretary and Parish Treasurer.

For our Church

In making and meeting our Stewardship Commitment, we are not paying for something; we are offering our commitment to the work of Jesus Christ and to his Church, which He has established for us. Our giving is an expression of our love for Christ who gave His life for our salvation and well-being. We give a portion of our resources

to continue the work of Christ in the world so that others may be blessed as we have been blessed.

Weekly Stewardship Giving

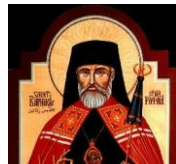
You may remit your commitment in the manner that suits you best. Since small regular contributions are easier to manage, it is suggested that your contribution be made on a weekly basis, using the convenient weekly stewardship envelopes. Simply divide your yearly pledge by 52 or your monthly pledge by 4.33 to determine your weekly contribution.

We Owe Everything to God

“When you are generous, you are not bestowing a gift, but repaying a debt. Everything you possess materially comes from God, who created all things. And every spiritual and moral virtue you possess is through divine grace. Thus you owe every-thing to God. More than that, God has given you his Son, to show you how to live: how to use your material possessions, and how to grow in moral and spiritual virtue. We may say that your material and spiritual possession cost God nothing; God created the universe in order to express his own glory. But the gift of his Son was supremely costly, because his Son suffered and died for our sakes. The agony of Christ on the Cross is the measure of how much God loves us. For this reason we should take none of our gifts, material or spiritual, for granted; day-by-day we should give thanks to God for what he has bestowed on us. Once this spirit of gratitude infuses us, we shall see generosity for what it is. We will regard our act as no more than a small token of appreciation for all that we have received or, more precisely, the repayment of a tiny fraction of God's blessings.” St. John Chrysostom.

Lives of the Saints

Saint Raphael of Brooklyn



Commemorated on February 27

St. Raphael (Hawaweeny), the first Orthodox bishop consecrated in the New World, was born in Beirut, on or near the Synaxis of the Archangels, November 8, 1860, to pious Orthodox parents, Michael and Mariam Hawaweeny. Due to the violent persecution of the Christians of Damascus in July, 1860, which saw the martyrdom of the Hawaweeny family's parish priest, the New-Hieromartyr Joseph of Damascus, and hundreds of their neighbors (all are commemorated on July 11), Michael and his pregnant wife Mariam fled from Damascus to Beirut. It was here that the future saint first saw the light of day. Indeed as the child's life unfolded, it was evident that he would have no continuing city in this world, but would seek the city which is to come (Hebrews 13:14).

He received his primary and secondary education in the parochial schools of Damascus, and his first theological training at the Ecumenical Patriarchate's Theological School at Halki in the Princes Islands. He later studied at the Kiev Theological Academy in Imperial Russia.

During this time, the Syro-Arab community in the United States was growing at an increasing rate. A Syrian Orthodox Benevolent Society was organized in New York City and the president, Dr. Ibrahim Arbeely, contacted St. Raphael, then a priest, about coming to the United States. St. Raphael met with Bishop Nicholas in St. Petersburg and in 1895 returned with him to the United States to serve the Syro-Arab community.

St. Raphael was placed in charge of the entire Syrian Orthodox Mission. He was assigned to New York City and organized the parish which later became St. Nicholas Cathedral in Brooklyn. He supervised the development of other Syrian communities, traveling widely through the United States in 1896 to organize parishes. By 1898, St. Raphael published a large Arabic Service Book for use in his churches. Later in the same year, he was to be the ranking representative of the American Mission to greet St. Tikhon

(Bellavin), the new diocesan bishop. At the Liturgy on December 15, 1898, he spoke of St. Tikhon's mission in his sermon. "He has been sent here to tend the flock of Christ - Russians, Slavs, Syro-Arabs, and Greeks -which is scattered across the entire North American continent."

St. Tikhon recognized his qualities and wanted St. Raphael to be one of his vicar-bishops in the reorganized diocese. In 1903, St. Tikhon went to Russia and asked the Holy Synod to approve his plan for the election of St. Raphael as his vicar-bishop. They approved St. Raphael's election and also consecrated Bishop Innocent (Pustynsky) as St. Tikhon's vicar-bishop for Alaska.

On March 12, 1904, the solemn rite of the election of St. Raphael as Bishop of Brooklyn was performed by St. Tikhon and Bishop Innocent at the Russian St. Nicholas Cathedral in Manhattan after the Vigil. The consecration took place the next day at the Syrian St. Nicholas Church in Brooklyn, with St. Raphael making his Confession of Faith both in Slavonic and Arabic.

Following his consecration, St. Raphael continued his work among the Syrian Orthodox and also helped St. Tikhon and his successors to administer the North American Mission. St. Raphael presided at the clergy conference held in Old Forge, Pennsylvania, on August 2, 1905, in the absence of St. Tikhon. He also consecrated the grounds of St. Tikhon's Monastery in South Canaan, Pennsylvania, the first Orthodox monastery in the New World. He founded the magazine The Word Magazine in 1905. After twenty years of service in North America, St. Raphael fell asleep in Christ at his residence next to his cathedral on Pacific Street in Brooklyn on February 27, 1915. At the time of his repose, he administered thirty Syrian Orthodox congregations with 25,000 faithful.

St. Raphael's sacred relics were first interred in a crypt beneath the holy table at his St. Nicholas Cathedral (March 7, 1915), later buried in the Syrian Section of Brooklyn's Mt. Olivet Cemetery (April 2,

1922), and finally translated to Holy Resurrection Cemetery at the Antiochian Village near Ligonier, Pennsylvania (August 15, 1988).

His sanctity was officially proclaimed on March 29, 2000, and his glorification celebrated on May 29, 2000, at St. Tikhon's Monastery.

Reports

Annual Parish Meeting – January 25, 2009

On January 18 the preliminary agenda for the Annual Meeting was distributed to parishioners attending the liturgy. The results of the meeting will be posted on the bulletin board the first week of February.

The items of discussion include the election of four members of the Parish Council, two auditors and a delegate and alternate to the Annual Diocesan Assembly. They also include reports from Father Basil and chairpersons for Church functions: Warden, Treasurer, Church school, Bookstore, Choir, Financial Audit and Hospitality. The 2009 budget proposal is included. *This proposed budget indicates that the Parish is not taking in enough money to pay for highly reduced expenses (See Orthopraxis article).* A charities activities proposal for 2009 is also included.

Charities

Ann Worobey continues to coordinate the Homeless Shelter Dinners. **The next Homeless Shelter dinner for this winter will be Sunday, February 1. Homeless Shelter dinners will also be served Sundays, March 1 and April 5.**

Please contact Ann Worobey at (408) 867-5934 to volunteer to cook, serve, clean-up. Check the bulletin board to see what donations of food and time are needed.

Several people interested in the Charities program for 2009 met on January 18. They fashioned a proposal for this program to be presented at the Annual Meeting on January 25.

Hospitality

By Vera Bagshaw

The new year has started and the hospitality committee is in dire need of new members. We are losing most of the members of the current team and need 3 –4 new ones to replace them. The workload is very minimal – we have volunteers who are willing to help, but we need folks who are willing to lead.

Special events – The committee is contacted (usually by Fr Basil) when there is a special event on the horizon. It is the committee's responsibility to coordinate a menu and then contact the roster to determine who is available to help with the particular event. Once the volunteers are signed up, the committee fills in the gaps and coordinates the event. Depending on the scope of the event, volunteers may need to be rallied to help with set-up and clean-up. We only had two events last year so this is not a big time commitment. There is, however, a deep satisfaction in seeing our church host a nice event for others.

Weekly lunch – There are several tasks involved with the lunch program that can be divided among the members of the committee. Someone needs to maintain the sign-up roster and post updates in the church hall. It would be nice to send out a monthly reminder of the lunches coming up. If there are gaps in the schedule, Sunday announcements need to be submitted and an e-mail sent out soliciting volunteers to fill those gaps. In the event that a gap cannot be filled, donuts and/or bagels need to be purchased. There is a petty cash fund to cover the cost of the donuts/bagels. That's it.

The tasks of the hospitality committee are not overwhelming, but they are so very important to our life as a community. It is after church each Sunday that people can sit down and chat and really get to know each other. When there is an outside event, it is gratifying to be able to offer guests a nice reception to give them a chance to meet and/or get to know us a little better. And who knows - it may be someone's first introduction to Orthodoxy.

As mentioned earlier, we need 3 – 4 people to guide this work. Our current group is disengaging at the end of January so if we do not have a new group in place, these programs may start to deteriorate and may come to end altogether. Please don't let that happen. If you have a little extra time to send a few e-mails or pick up some donuts/bagels, please volunteer.

Thanks very much!

Your 2008 Hospitality Committee

Vera Bagshaw
Nancy Jones (moving to Oregon)
Inessa Kapustina
Natasha Kolesnikov
Mat Joanie Rhodes