

St Michael's Orthodox Church

A parish of the Orthodox Church in America, Diocese of Eastern Pennsylvania

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January 5, 2025 – Eve of Theophany. Sunday Before Theophany

Today is a Strict Fast Day, similar to Good Friday or Christmas Eve.

Schedule of Services

Saturday, Jan 4, 4:00 p.m. – Great Vespers & Confessions

Sunday, Jan 5, 9:30 a.m. – Divine Liturgy & Fellowship

Monday, January 6 is the Feast of the Theophany (Epiphany) of Our Lord.

Sunday, Jan 5, 4:00 p.m. – Small Festal Vigil

Monday, Jan 6, 9:00 a.m. – Festal Divine Liturgy and the Great Blessing of Water

Tuesday, Jan 7, 4:00 p.m. – Monthly Parish Council Meeting

Saturday, Jan 11, 4:00 p.m. – Great Vespers & Confessions

Sunday, Jan 12, 9:30 a.m. – Divine Liturgy & Fellowship

Coffee Hour is offered by:

Jan. 5: Ruthie Lasichak & Roxanne Neutts

Jan. 12: Vickie Kravitsky & Charette Radionoff

Jan 19: Susan Schlasta & Deborah Bernosky

Jan 26: Millie Telep & Mat. Alexandra

Dec. 29: Mat. Dolores & Marilyn Petorak

Today's Scripture

Epistle: 2 Timothy 4:5-8

My son Timothy: Be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.

Gospel: Mark 1:1-8

THE BEGINNING OF THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST, THE SON OF GOD.
As it is written in the Prophets:

*“Behold, I send My messenger before Your face,
Who will prepare Your way before You.*

The voice of one crying in the wilderness:

‘Prepare the way of the LORD; make His paths straight.’”

John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair and with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. And he preached, saying, “There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose. I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

In your prayers

The ill and the afflicted: Fr. Daniel Donlick, Fr Gregory White, Pdn. Gabriel Petorak, Dn Geoffrey LoBalbo, Mat. Myra Kovalek, Gregory Hansen, Olga Krutz, Maryanne Krisa, Michael Krisa, Barbara Mosley, Mary Ann Serafini, Alexis Meholic, Tom Shaw, Marilyn Petorak, Sandy Gillott, Debbie Jadick, Susan Schlasta, Karina Goetter, Evan Kraky, Laura Piwowarski, Karen Abercia, Mark Klapatch, Gregory Klapatch. **Homebound or in hospitals:** John Drutarosky, Theresa Krenitsky, Barbara Palubniak, Peggy Petrilak, Nicholas Mattise, Jerry & Marilyn Soroka, Paul Kostiak, Dolores Brophy, Paul Mosley, Adam & Mary Ann Serafini, Florence Zielinsky. **The newly-departed:** Fr. Michael Evans (11/14., Mat. Marie Meyendorff (11/24). Mat. Jeanne Ciarciaglino (12/16). Mat. Eugenia Nehrebecki (1/2) (grandmother of Fr. Stephen Vernak of our Harrisburg parish and Mat. Anastasia Gorodenchuk of our Philadelphia cathedral).

The list of departed names for January will be published on either 1/12 or 1/19.

Hymns of the Day

Resurrection (Tone 3)

Let the heavens rejoice! / Let the earth be glad! /
For the Lord has shown strength with His arm. / He
has trampled down death by death. / He has become
the first born of the dead. / He has delivered us from
the depths of hell, / and has granted to the world
great mercy.

Eve of Theophany (Tone 4)

The River Jordan was turned back by the mantle of
Elisha, / after Elijah had been taken up to heaven. /
The waters were parted in two, / and the stream
became a dry path. / This was truly a type of baptism,
/ by which we pass over the stream of life. // Christ
has shone forth in the Jordan to sanctify the waters.

Resurrection (Tone 3)

On this day, Thou didst rise from the tomb, O Merciful One, /
leading us from the gates of death. / On this day, Adam exults
as Eve rejoices. / With the prophets and patriarchs // they un-
ceasingly praise the divine majesty of Thy power.

Eve of Theophany (Tone 2)

O Christ, in Thy compassion and infinite mercy, / Thou art
coming as a man to be baptized in the Jordan, / in order to take
away the many transgressions of us all, / clothing me in the
garment of ancient glory // of which I was cruelly stripped bare.

Eve of Theophany (Tone 4)

Today the Lord enters the Jordan and cries out to John: / “Do
not be afraid to baptize Me. // For I have come to save Adam,
the first-formed man.”

55 Maxims of the Christian Life

by Fr. Thomas Hopko

1. Be always with Christ and trust God in everything.
2. Pray as you can, not as you think you must.
3. Have a keepable rule of prayer done by discipline.
4. Say the Lord's Prayer several times each day.
5. Repeat a short prayer when your mind is not occupied.
6. Make some prostrations when you pray.
7. Eat good foods in moderation and fast on fasting days.
8. Practice silence, inner and outer.
9. Sit in silence 20 to 30 minutes each day.
10. Do acts of mercy in secret.
11. Go to liturgical services regularly.
12. Go to confession and holy communion regularly.
13. Do not engage intrusive thoughts and feelings.
14. Reveal all your thoughts and feelings to a trusted person regularly.
15. Read the scriptures regularly.
16. Read good books, a little at a time.
17. Cultivate communion with the saints.
18. Be an ordinary person, one of the human race.
19. Be polite with everyone, first of all family members.
20. Maintain cleanliness and order in your home.
21. Have a healthy, wholesome hobby.
22. Exercise regularly.
23. Live a day, even a part of a day, at a time.
24. Be totally honest, first of all with yourself.
25. Be faithful in little things.
26. Do your work, then forget it.
27. Do the most difficult and painful things first.
28. Face reality.
29. Be grateful.
30. Be cheerful.
31. Be simple, hidden, quiet and small.
32. Never bring attention to yourself.
33. Listen when people talk to you.
34. Be awake and attentive, fully present where you are.
35. Think and talk about things no more than necessary.
36. Speak simply, clearly, firmly, directly.
37. Flee imagination, fantasy, analysis, figuring things out.
38. Flee carnal, sexual things at their first appearance.
39. Don't complain, grumble, murmur or whine.
40. Don't seek or expect pity or praise.
41. Don't compare yourself with anyone.
42. Don't judge anyone for anything.
43. Don't try to convince anyone of anything.
44. Don't defend or justify yourself.
45. Be defined and bound by God, not people.
46. Accept criticism gracefully and test it carefully.
47. Give advice only when asked or when it is your duty.
48. Do nothing for people that they can and should do for themselves.
49. Have a daily schedule of activities, avoiding whim and caprice.
50. Be merciful with yourself and others.
51. Have no expectations except to be fiercely tempted to your last breath.
52. Focus exclusively on God and light, and never on darkness, temptation and sin.
53. Endure the trial of yourself and your faults serenely, under God's mercy.
54. When you fall, get up immediately and start over.
55. Get help when you need it, without fear or shame.

**Orthodox Christian Stewardship:
What do Jesus, the Bible, and the Church Fathers Say
about Tithing and Giving to God?**

by John G. Panagiotou

“Where your treasure is there will your heart be also.”¹ These words of Jésus have resonated within the hearts of people for two thousand years. What was Jesus talking about? What do Jesus, the Bible, and the Church Fathers have to say about tithing and giving to God?

The Scriptures have no less than 2,350 verses having to do with money and money management. Jesus speaks about money and money management more than any other topic including heaven, hell, salvation etc. The topic is very important for the Christian life.

In an often-misquoted verse, St. Paul the Apostle writes, “the love of money is the root of all evil”.² St. Paul teaches that our Lord realizes that we have needs to meet in order to live and to carry out His work. God is, however, a jealous God and demands our full commitment with nothing else taking precedence over His Lordship in our lives. That is why the Apostle Paul warns his first century Greek congregation that the love of money is evil.

All that we have is on loan from God. It is all gift. What we do with our time, talent, and treasures will have to be given account of on the last day. This was the great sin of disobedience by Adam in the Garden of Eden. He abused his gift of stewardship. King Solomon who was the richest and wisest man of all time, expressed his feeling of the emptiness of materialism apart from God when he said, “vanity of vanities, it is all a bubble that bursts”.

In the book of Genesis, the mysterious paradigmatic priest of priests Melchizedek appears to perform one task alone: to collect the tithe from Abraham and to thus confer a blessing upon him on behalf of the Lord.³ This clearly shows that Abraham in his righteousness before God gave of his first fruits (his best fruits) unto the Lord and in turn was blessed. This is precisely what God is calling us to do. We as believers are each called upon to give sacrificially of our best resources first and God will take care of the rest as He did with Father Abraham.

As individuals, when we become burdened with a mindset of materialism (i.e. non-stewardship focused giving) we become slaves to our wealth instead of our wealth becoming our servants for the promotion of God's Kingdom. This clearly is not the way that God intended it to be. Inevitably, we squander the gifts of our resources. Then a multitude of other problems emerge namely the bondage of debt. For truly, as the Preacher teaches in Ecclesiastes and Proverbs, “the borrower is a slave to the lender”.⁴

All of these principles not only apply to the individual Christian, but to the life of a congregation as well. Jesus is clear in the New Testament when He says that He would build and grow the Church and that the task at hand for believers is to make disciples who are followers of Jesus amongst the nations. That is what the core culture of a parish and diocese should be all about. That is what the ultimate focus of any and all monetary collections should be about. As the late great Russian theologian Georges Florovsky would write on the matter:

¹ Matthew 6:21.

² 1 Timothy 6:10.

³ Genesis 14:18-20.

⁴ Proverbs 22:7.

The primary task of the historical Church is the proclamation of another world “to come.” The Church bears witness to the New Life, disclosed and revealed in Christ Jesus, the Lord and Saviour. This it does both by word and deed. The true proclamation of the Gospel would be precisely the practice of this New Life: to show faith by deeds (cf. Matt. 5:16). The Church is more than a company of preachers, or a teaching society, or a missionary board. It has not only to invite people, but also to introduce them into this New Life, to which it bears witness.

It is a missionary body indeed, and its mission field is the whole world. But the aim of its missionary activity is not merely to convey to people certain convictions or ideas, not even to impose on them a definite discipline or a rule of life, but first of all to introduce them into the New Reality, to convert them, to bring them through their faith and repentance to Christ Himself, that they should be born anew in Him and into Him by water and the Spirit. Thus the ministry of the Word is completed in the ministry of the Sacraments.⁵

If you want to know the spiritual state and strength of a church, just look at its stewardship report. Invariably, it tells it all because what people do with their money speaks volumes. We make disciples by giving people Jesus through preaching, teaching, the sacramental life, the liturgical life and outreach ministries. It is to this end that our giving should be focused. If the *ekklesia* will do its job, Jesus has promised to be faithful and do His. Sacrificial giving for the Christian is not an option, but a joyful obligation. St. John Chrysostom in the 4th century speaks of this joyful obligation in his book *On Wealth and Poverty* when he writes that the Christian owns nothing because God owns everything.⁶

The ecclesial ministry in its essence is not about buildings, budgets, and bodies. The model that we ought to follow is that the Church should be viewed first and foremost as the family of God, not just as another corporation or business. When that happens, the Bible tells us that inevitably God's presence and blessing can be seen manifest in the local eucharistic community because its focus is on Jesus the Author of our salvation. It is then when we see the fullness of the Faith express itself, not only in the transformation of the elements into the Body and Blood of Christ, but when the celebrant and those worshipers present are transfigured into the Body of Christ as well.

With these things in mind, proper Christian stewardship for individuals and congregations should include the following four principles: 1) the glorification of God should be the focus; 2) giving should be sacrificial; 3) giving should be of the best of the first fruits of one's resources; and 4) debt has no place in this paradigm.

If you would incorporate these four principles of economics into your lives and the life of your congregation, the Lord has promised to do mighty, mighty works in your life and in the lives of all around you. A proper understanding of stewardship is not a luxury in our private life as a Christian and in our collective life as the *Ekklesia*. For us to be truly “called out from the world” as the word *ekklesia* connotes, is to take up the mantle and responsibility of stewardship and all that it entails.

⁵ Georges Florovsky, “The Church: Her Nature and Task” in *The Universal Church in God's Design*, vol. 1 (S.C.M. Press, 1948).

⁶ John Chrysostom, *On Wealth and Poverty* [trans.] (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984).