

*The Self-Ruled Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese
Of North America*

*The Diocese of Eagle River and the Northwest
Antiochian Orthodox Church of the Annunciation*

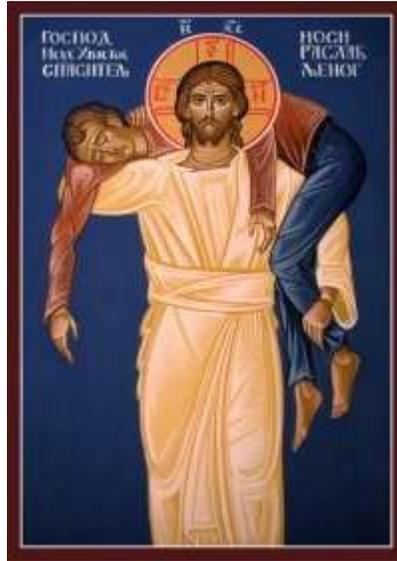
كنيسة البشارة الأرثوذكسية الأنطاكية

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Sunday November 15th, 2015

Tone 7 / Eothinon 2

Twenty-fourth Sunday after Pentecost & Eighth Sunday of Luke

Sunday Services:

Vespers on Saturday 6:00 PM, Sunday Matins 9:30 AM

10:45 AM Divine Liturgy

RESURRECTIONAL APOLYTIKION IN TONE SEVEN

Thou didst shatter death by Thy Cross, Thou didst open paradise to the thief; Thou didst turn the sadness of the ointment-bearing women into joy. And didst bid Thine Apostles proclaim a warning, that Thou hast risen O Christ, granting to the world the Great Mercy.

APOLYTIKION FOR SS. GURIA, SHAMUNA AND HABIB IN TONE FIVE Since Thou hast given us the miracles of Thy holy Martyrs Guria, Shamuna and Habib as an invincible battlement, by their entreaties scatter the counsels of the heathen, O Christ our God, and strengthen the faith of Orthodox Christians, since Thou art good and the Lover of mankind.

- Now sing the apolytikion of the patron saint or feast of the temple.

KONTAKION OF THE ENTRANCE OF THE THEOTOKOS IN TONE FOUR

(**Thou Who wast raised up**)

The all-pure temple of the Savior, the most precious bridal chamber and Virgin, the treasure house of the glory of God, today enters the Temple of the Lord, bringing with her the grace which is in the divine Spirit: whom also the angels of God do celebrate in song; for she is the heavenly tabernacle.

الطروباريات:

(للقيامة – باللحن السابع):

حطمت بصليبك الموت وفتحت للّص الفردوس/ وحوّلت نوح حاملات الطيب وأمرت رسلك أن يكرزوا/ بأنك قد قُمت أيها المسيح الإله/ مانحاً العالم الرحمة العظمى.

ترتل طروبارية القديس شفيع الكنيسة

(للبشارة – باللحن الرابع)

اليوم رأس خلاصنا، وإعلان السر الذي منذ الدهور، لأن ابن الله يصير ابن البتول، وجبرائيل بالنعمة يبشّر، فلذلك ونحن معه لنهتف نحو والدة الإله، إفرحي أيتها الممتلئة نعمة الرب معك.

القتداق:

لدخول العذراء الى الهيكل

اليوم الهيكل الذي للمخلص، الكلي النقاء العذراء الخدر، ذو الثمن الجزيل وهي الكنز الطاهر لمجد الإله، إذ تدخل بيت الرب تُدخل نعمة الروح الإلهي معها، فلنسبحها ملائكة الله، لأنها المظلة السماوية.

The Epistle:

(For the Twenty-Fourth Sunday after Pentecost)

The Lord will give strength to His people.

Ascribe to the Lord, O sons of God, ascribe to the Lord honor and glory.

The Reading from the Epistle of St. Paul to the Ephesians. (2:14-22)

Brethren, Christ is our peace, Who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in His flesh the law of commandments and ordinances, that He might create in Himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the Cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end. And He came and preached peace to you, who were far off, and peace to those who were near; for through Him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone, in Whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in Whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

الرسالة

أفسس 2: 14-22

يا إخوة، إن المسيح هو سلامنا، هو جعل الإثنين واحداً ونقض في جسده حائط السياج الحاجز اي العداوة، وأبطل ناموس الوصايا في فرائضه ليخلق الإثنين في نفسه إنساناً واحداً جديداً بإجرائه السلام، ويصالح كليهما في جسد واحد مع الله في الصليب بقتله العداوة في نفسه، فجاء وبشركم بالسلام، البعيدين منكم والقريبين، لأنّ به لنا كلينا التوصل إلى الأب في روح واحد. فلستم غرباء بعد ونزلاء بل مواطني القديسين وأهل بيت الله، وقد بُنيتم على أساس الرسل والأنبياء،

وحجر الزاوية هو يسوع المسيح نفسه، الذي به يُنسق البنيان كُلُّه فينمو هيكلًا مقدَّسًا في الرب، وفيه أنتم أيضًا تُبنون معًا مسكنًا لله في الروح.

The Gospel

(For the Eighth Sunday of Luke)

The Reading from the Holy Gospel according to St. Luke. (10:25-37)

At that time, a lawyer stood up to put Jesus to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read?" And the lawyer answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." And Jesus said to him, "You have answered right; do this, and you will live." But the lawyer, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was; and when he saw him, he had compassion, and went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; then he set him on his own beast and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' Which of these three, do you think, proved neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" The lawyer said, "The one who showed mercy on him." And Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

الإنجيل

لوقا 10: 25-37

في ذلك الزمان دنا إلى يسوع ناموسيٌّ وقال مجربًا له: يا معلم ماذا أعمل لأرث الحياة الأبدية؟ فقال له: ماذا كُتِبَ في الناموس، كيف تقرأ؟ فأجاب وقال: أحبب الربَّ إلهك من كل قلبك ومن كل نفسك ومن كل قدرتك ومن كل ذهنك، وقريبك كنفسك. فقال له: بالصواب أجبت، اعمل هذا فتحيا. فأراد أن يزكي نفسه فقال لیسوع: ومن قريبي؟ فعاد يسوع وقال: كان إنسانٌ منحدراً من أورشليم إلى أريحا، فوقع بين لصوصٍ فعروه وجرحوه وتركوه بين حيٍّ وميت. فاتفق أن كاهنًا كان منحدراً في ذلك الطريق فأبصره وجاز من أمامه. وكذلك لاويٌّ، وأتى إلى المكان فأبصره وجاز من أمامه. ثم إن سامريًا مسافرًا مرَّ به، فلمَّا رآه تحنن، فدنا إليه وضمد جراحاته وصبَّ عليها زيتًا وخمرًا، وحمله على دابَّته وأتى به إلى فندقٍ واعتنى بأمره. وفي الغد فيما هو خارجٌ أخرج دينارين وأعطاهما لصاحب الفندق وقال له: اعتنِ بأمره، ومهما تُنفق فوق هذا فأنا أدفعه لك عند عودتي. فأبى هؤلاء الثلاثة تحسب صار قريبًا للذي وقع بين اللصوص؟ قال: الذي صنع إليه الرحمة. فقال له يسوع: امض فاصنع أنت أيضًا كذلك.

المسيح سلامنا

قال الرسول بولس لأهل أفسس في رسالة اليوم: «المسيح هو سلامنا». هذا يعني ان الذين ينتسبون إلى المسيح يُجابهن كل قوة بهذا القول: «المسيح هو سلامنا»، ويعني أيضًا أن الذي يستعمل وسائل غير وسيلة المسيح لا يساهم في بناء السلام الذي جاء الناصري ليؤكد.

قيل عن يسوع في الكتاب المقدس انه هو السلام لأن السلام من أسماء الله، وبالتالي لا يستطيع أن يأتي بسلام الا ذلك الذي يُقرّ العدل، وبعد أن يُقرّ العدل يُقرّ المحبة. فلا محبة بلا عدل، ولا عدل إذا تعمّدنا قتل الأبرياء، ولا عدل إذا قصدنا الحرب ونحن نتكلم بالسلام. فقد قال نبيّ لليهود في ما مضى: «سلام، سلام، وليس سلام» (إرميا 6: 14) اي انهم يقولون «سلام» وهم يُضمرون الحرب.

من أراد إحلال السلام يُقرّ أولاً ان العدل هو السلام. يبدأ من العدل لا من الخوف. يُقرّ العدل لكل الناس، لمن نتخوّف منهم ولمن لا نتخوّف منهم. الإنسان العادل يطرح الخوف خارجا حسب قول يوحنا الرسول في رسالته الأولى: «لا خوف في المحبة، بل المحبة الكاملة تطرح الخوف إلى الخارج» (١٨: ٤).

«المسيح هو سلامنا»، والمسيح لا يعني ان الناس يجب ان يتوسّطوا أو ان يتصدّوا للناس حتى يكونوا أبناء العدل. كل الذين يعدّلون، مهما كان معتقدتهم، تنطبق عليهم هذه الكلمة «المسيح هو سلامنا». كم من دولة لا تقوم على العدل وتفرّق بين الكبير والصغير وبين القوي والضعيف هي ساحقة ليسوع الناصري وترفعه اليوم على خشبة.

«المسيح سلامنا». العدل سلامنا. هذه هي اللغة التي نتخاطب بها بين الشعوب. اللغة المسيحية الواحدة هي لغة العدل، وبعد ذلك نتكلم عن معمودية منسوبة بالمعمودية وبالتسميات وبالتاريخ. وهو «الذي يجعل الإثنين في نفسه إنسانا واحدا». إذا تخاصم اثنان، يأتیان اليه، وما عدا ذلك فتسوية. يأتي الاثنان اليه أي إلى البر وإلى الحق. فالمسيح وحده محاً «حائط السياج الحاجز أي العداوة». العداوة لا تبطل على موائد السلام، ولا تبطل في قوى حفظ السلام، العداوة تبطل في القلب. وإذا كانت القلوب مشحونة بالبعضاء وبالاحتقار لمن أدلّوا مئات السنين، فلا خلاص الا بالمسيح هو الذي مع المسحوقين ومع المظلومين كائنا من كانوا.

المسيح هو الذي يجعل ابن البشر إنسانا واحدا جديدا بإجرائه السلام. هو يُصالح كليهما في جسد واحد مع الله بقتله العداوة. جاء وبشّرهم بالسلام البعيدين منهم والقريبين. ولهذا نحن مدعوون لتحقيق السلام في بلادنا وفي جوارنا، هذا ما معناه أننا أبناء السلام. المسيحي هو الذي يعطي الثقة لأن الثقة لا تقتل الشعوب ولأن الثقة تُطلق الصديق والعدو. فإن كنا أبناء القيامة، فهذا يعني أن لنا ثقة بأن الحياة تأتي من الموت. وإن كنا أبناء القيامة، فهذا يعني أننا بثقتنا نشجع الخائفين. وإن كنا من أبناء القيامة، فهذا يعني إقرارا أكيدا وصريحا وعميقا ومُخلصا أن العدل والسلام يسودان الأرض وأن المسيح سيد الكل.

جاورجيوس مطران جبيل والبترون وما يليهما (جبل لبنان).

Announcements

Call for Semi-Annual General Assembly

Dear members of the Antiochain Orthodox Church of the Annunciation;

Christ is in our midst... He is and ever shall be

The Members of the Parish Council are pleased to invite you to attend the semi-annual general assembly which will be convened on Sunday December 13, 2015 after the Divine Liturgy. The purpose of this semi-annual general assembly is to approve releasing funds for the complete design of the new Church and to present the future steps towards building it.

We look forward seeing you all in the meeting to work together for the best of our Church.

Nov 9, 2015

**Acting Secretary of the Parish Council,
Hafez Massara**

الدعوة الى الإجتماع النصف السنوي

السادة أعضاء كنيسة البشارة الأنطاكية الأورثوذكسية:

المسيح فيما بيننا... كان و كائن و سيكون

يود أعضاء مجلس الرعية دعوتكم لحضور الاجتماع النصف السنوي المنعقد بتاريخ 13 كانون الأول 2015 بعد القداس الإلهي للموافقة على صرف مبلغ مخصص للتصميم الكامل للكنيسة الجديدة و مناقشة الخطوات اللاحقة اللازمة لبنائها.

نأمل حضوركم جميعاً للعمل معاً لخير كنيستنا.

- ❖ **Your Help is needed:** Several new families are in need of a ride on Sunday from the NE area and 26 Ave SW. Some families are in need of the following: kitchen items, pots, dishes, silver ware etc. sofas, living rooms, coffee tables, bedroom dressers, towels, blankets, winter clothes for adults, teens and children. Please see Father, Skia, Mirna, or Hanan.
- ❖ **Giving back to God:** Everything we have belongs to God. If we come to church every few weeks or months and give only a few dollars, how can our church continue paying its bills? Give regularly and consistently.
- ❖ **Can You Help:** Our brothers and sisters who arrived recently to our country of Canada need jobs. Are you an employer or do you know someone who is hiring? Please let Father know. Many are still struggling with English, so we need jobs where English is not needed a lot.
- ❖ **The Entry of the Mother of God to the Temple:** will be celebrated on Friday November 20th with Orthros at 6 PM followed by the Divine Liturgy.
- ❖ **Teens Basketball:** November 22nd after Liturgy. God willing Fr. George will play with the teens.

UPCOMING DATES TO PUT ON YOUR CALENDARS

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- ❖ **The Nativity Fast:** The Nativity Fast starts on November 15th and continues until December 24th at midnight. It is as follows: Fish is permitted on Saturday and Sunday. On Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays no meat, poultry, dairy products, cheese, fish, Olive Oil or alcohol are permitted. On Tuesdays and Thursdays alcohol and olive oil are permitted. From December 21-24, these are strict fast days. If you have any question or if you are taking medications, please speak to Father.
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- ❖ **What Orthodox People Do:** Every time we prepare for a major feast, we fast, we spend more time in prayers, we give alms to the poor, we repent from our sins by going to confession. Father is reminding everyone to go to confession before the Nativity of our Lord (Christmas). As Orthodox Christians during the fast we refrain from parties and all kind of worldly celebrations to concentrate on repentance and prayers.
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- ❖ **Ladies News: Bake Sale:** Our Bake sale this year will be December 5th and 6th. Please see Sara, Skia or Jackeline. It's time to purchase all your holiday sweets!
- ❖ **Christmas Play:** will be December 20th at St. Demetrius Greek Church from 4-8 PM. Tickets are \$15 adults, and \$10 for children. Please, print the flyer that you received in your email, cut out the ticket stub in the bottom right hand corner, fill it out with the number of adults and children. Give it to Mirna with your payment to reserve your seats. Space is limited so buy your tickets this week!

➤ **New Year's Party: 2016 NEW YEAR'S PARTY, December 31, 2015.**
St. Stephen's Ukrainian Church Hall: 4903—45 St. SW, Calgary, AB.
Cocktails 6:30 pm, Dinner 8:00 pm
Prices: Adults \$70, children 6-10 Yrs. old \$35, Under 5 Yrs. Free.
Please see Hafiz for tickets.

- ❖ **The Bible in the Liturgy**: visit the following website: <http://almoutran.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/The-Bible-In-The-Liturgy.pdf>
- ❖ **Business Directory**: Many people in our community own businesses. Please, give Father your business card, Father would like to create a business directory for our members. We should support our brothers and sisters, members of our Christian community in Calgary.
- ❖ **Food for The Hungry**: Please, bring canned and non-perishable food for the poor people. The drive will continue until the end of the year. The non-perishable food will be distributed to local homeless shelters.
- ❖ **Vespers Every Wednesday**: followed by Bible Studies.

*****6 Reasons Why Tithing is Good for an Orthodox Parish: by Fr. Andrew Stephen Damick**

Tithing is good for the Orthodox Christian and therefore good for the Orthodox parish. So why don't more Orthodox Christians tithe?

We know the usual reasons: We're not used to it. Back in the old country the government paid for the church. The parish was founded on the "dues" model. Tithing is "Protestant." Orthodox people are stingy. We just don't have it in our culture.

Those things are all true in one way or another, but I don't think those are the real reasons that we do not tithe very much as Orthodox Christians. There are some who do, of course, but it's not very many of us. So what is the reason why we're so terrible at tithing?

I believe that it is because we don't know why we tithe.

And because we don't know why, we don't do it. And when we don't do it, then we come up with the various reasons given above as the cause of our non-tithing. But those aren't the real reasons. It's because we don't know why we should tithe.

Now, the reasons I am going to list below are not all equally important. Indeed, if I had to answer the question, "Why should I tithe?" I would answer only with #1. That's the real reason. #2-#6 are essentially useful effects of tithing that should help us to focus on #1.

So here are six of my reasons. #1 is the most important and really the point of all of it.

1. Tithing enables us to be saved.

As Christians, we want to be saved. We want to be healed. We want to "go to heaven" rather than to hell when we die (setting aside for the moment all the details). We want to become like Christ. Tithing doesn't purchase all that for us, but tithing is a powerful way that we give of ourselves, that we turn over what we have to God so that we are opened to receive His healing and blessing.

It's a basic principle of Christian spiritual life that we cannot receive God's blessing if we are holding back on Him. Why? We can't be filled with God if we remain full of ourselves. Tithing helps us to empty ourselves.

Don't get me wrong—giving money is not the *only* way that we work out our salvation and become open to receiving blessings. But whatever we have, we have to give to God. And if we have money, then we have to give money. If we don't have money, then of course we don't have to give it. But we have to give what we have, whatever it is, and with the way our culture is so grasping and possessive about money, it really is one of the *best* things for us to give if we can.

Money is one of the places where we spiritually hurt the most! So we need to pay attention to that wound.

2. Tithing shows that we're serious.

When I speak of tithing here, I am referring most obviously to giving 10% of income, but for this article, you can define tithing as **serious giving**. 10% is serious for most of us. For some of us who are more affluent, 10% is not that serious, and we should do more because we can. And for some of us, 10% is unaffordable, so we need to be serious with another percentage. But the point is to be serious. So if you're not serious, get serious.

How do you know if you're serious? Well, to start with, if you're spending more on cable TV or other forms of entertainment every month than you're giving to the Church, it's a safe guess that you're not being serious about giving.

I love the phrase "put your money where your mouth is." It's definitely true. Jesus says almost exactly the same thing when He says, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matt. 6:21, Luke 12:34). Where we put our money proves where our hearts are. Where is *your* heart?

3. Tithing is absolutely Orthodox.

Some people say that tithing is not Orthodox. This is nonsense. Giving is Orthodox. Asceticism is Orthodox. Generosity is Orthodox. Ministry is Orthodox. Discipline is Orthodox.

The purpose in tithing is not because it is an "absolute requirement" in order to be saved. It's not. But how can we be saved if we do not nurture a truly generous heart? And how can we nurture that generous heart without becoming disciplined about giving all that we have? The Orthodox Church understands how to become disciplined. We understand asceticism. This is one of the best ways to do it.

Tithing was a *minimum* set up in the Old Covenant (and there were multiple tithes, equaling about 23%). 100% is the standard in the New Covenant (Acts 4), and when the Fathers talk about tithing, they say that because the New is superior to the Old, we give *more* than the Old Covenant people did.

So perhaps it's true that "tithing is not Orthodox." But that's not because we give *less* than 10%, but because we give *more* than 10%.

God is merciful, of course, and if we're not ready to meet that standard, we can work toward it. But are we working toward it? If not, let's get on it.

4. Tithing becomes ministry.

There are things that a parish would love to do but just can't because they don't have the money for it. Perhaps they could improve or repair the building or build a new one. They could start that iconography project. They could get an assistant priest. They could hire a youth director. They could give to charities. They could fund continuing education for the priest, the choir director, or other parish workers. They could bring in special speakers. They could sponsor kids to summer camp. They could sponsor people to go on pilgrimages. They could do a lot more outreach. They could feed the hungry and clothe the naked. The possibilities really are almost endless. The point is that God takes what we give, blesses it, and then returns it to us for our sanctification. When we give our money, God turns it into *ministry*.

And sometimes ministry is just the most basic things, like keeping the priest from having an outside secular job, keeping health insurance in place for him and his family, paying the parish's utility bills, buying supplies, etc.

When we tithe, that's what God does with our money. It doesn't go to lining anyone's pockets. Most clergy—not just Orthodox, but all clergy—are actually rather underpaid for their level of education, experience and the labor they put in. And almost none of them ever get a raise for preaching about tithing. *And a lot of them are tithing themselves.* In many parishes, the priest is one of the top givers, and he usually does it on a salary far below the parish average.

5. Tithing ends money problems for the parish, once and for all.

If a mission parish has 25 tithing families who each make roughly the national average (\$50k/yr.), the collective income for the parish would be \$125k, which is usually plenty for a mission to function on. If a parish has 50 tithing families who make that average, pledge income would be \$250k. We are now well above the income of most medium to small parishes.

If there are 100 families who tithe like that, the income would be \$500k. And they're probably about to burn any mortgage, buy new land, build something new or start a new mission. Or maybe they're hiring a couple more clergy, a secretary, etc. How many 100-family parishes have half a million dollars to use every year?

Even if half the families in a parish start tithing or even if that same half started giving just 5%, the parish would probably never have any more money problems ever.

6. Tithing changes a parish culture.

Related to #5, I sometimes hear that, if only the membership knew all the money problems in their parish, they would be inspired to give a little bit more. But usually the people who say that, knowing full well the financial situation of their parish, have not themselves increased their pledge. Giving information and insight to the unmotivated usually doesn't accomplish much.

But what if we started thinking about parish life in a whole new way?

What if we stopped talking and worrying about paying for things and started thinking about why each of us needs to become generous, serious givers? We have to put the horse before the cart: We don't develop a culture of generosity by complaining about money problems. We develop a culture of generosity, and our money problems go away.

A tithing parish sees itself as a group of people ministering to one another, not as a group of people who are paying for something or expect to get something. And that's the kind of parish that's truly Christian, because they have love for each other (John 13:35).

Forty Shopping (and Fasting) Days Until Christmas (OCA.ORG)

On November 15, we observed the first day of the 40-day Nativity/Advent Fast, meant to prepare us for the advent of the Son of God in the flesh. For some/many of us, this might very well catch us unaware and unprepared. However, as the saying goes, "it is what it is," and so the Church calendar directs us to enter into this sacred season on that day. This indicates an intensification of the perennial "battle of the calendars" in which every Orthodox Christian is engaged—consciously or unconsciously. The two calendars – the *ecclesial* and the *secular* – represent the Church and "the world" respectively. Often, there is an underlying tension between these two spheres. Because of that tension, I believe that we find ourselves in the rather peculiar situation of being *ascetical* and *consumerist* simultaneously. To fast, pray and be charitable is to lead a simplified life that is based around restraint—a certain discipline and a primary choice to live according to the principles of the Gospel in a highly secularized and increasingly hedonistic world. That is what it means to be ascetical. It further means to focus upon Christ amidst an ever-increasing number of distractions and diversions. Even with the best of intentions and a firm resolve, that is not easy! From our historical perspective of being alive in the 21st century, and leading the "good life" where everything is readily available, practicing any form of voluntary self-restraint is tantamount to bearing a cross. Perhaps fulfilling some modest goals based on the Gospel in today's world, such as it is, amounts to a Christian witness, unspectacular as those goals may be.

Yet, as our society counts down the remaining shopping days until Christmas; and as our spending is seen as almost a patriotic act of contributing to the build-up of our failing economy; and as we want to "fit in" – especially for the sake of our children – we also are prone (or just waiting) to unleashing the "consumer within," always alert to the joys of shopping, spending and accumulating. When one adds in the unending "entertainment" designed to create a holiday season atmosphere, it can all become rather overwhelming. Certainly, these are some of the joys of family life, and we feel a deep satisfaction when we surround our children with the warmth and security that the sharing of gifts brings to our domestic

lives. Perhaps, though, we can be vigilant about knowing when “enough is enough”—or even better, when “enough is a feast.” An awareness – combined with sharing—of those who have next to nothing is also a way of overcoming our own self-absorption and expanding our notion of the “neighbor.”

Therefore, to be both an *ascetic* and a *consumer* is indicative of the challenges facing us as Christians in a world that clearly favors and “caters” to our consumerist tendencies. To speak honestly, this is a difficult and uneasy balance to maintain. How can it possibly be otherwise, when to live ascetically is to restrain those very consumerist tendencies? I believe that what we are essentially trying to maintain is our *identity* as Orthodox Christians within the confines of a culture either indifferent or hostile to Christianity. If the Church remains an essential part of the build-up toward Christmas, then we can go a long way in maintaining that balance. Although I do not particularly like putting it this way, I would contend that if the Church is a place of choice that at least “competes” with the mall, then that again may be one of the modest victories in the underlying battle for our ultimate loyalty to which a consumerist Christmas season awakens us. The Church directs us to fast before we feast. Does that make any sense? Do we understand the theological/spiritual principles that are behind such an approach? Can we develop some domestic strategies that will give us the opportunity to put that into practice to, at least some extent? Do we care enough?

The final question always returns us to the question that Jesus asked of his initial disciples: “Who do you say that I am?” If we, together with Saint Peter, confess that Jesus is “the Christ, the Son of the Living God,” then we know where we stand as the “battle of the calendars” intensifies for the next 40 days.