

Rector's Letter, December, 2017

Dear brothers and sisters:

Where are the saints in our lives? It's worth really asking ourselves: how important are the saints to us? We are proud of our beautiful church full of Orthodox iconography, but do we know their stories? Do we ask for their help by name? Do we gather eagerly to celebrate the memory of our beloved heroes, like our fathers and mothers in the faith always did? Our Church is guided by tradition, the Apostolic Faith "handed down" from generation to generation. It means that we owe a very personal debt of gratitude to those in every generation who received the Good News of Jesus Christ, lived it out in ways big and small, and passed on the Truth they learned to others. Quite simply, those people are the saints, whether they are famous or unknown.

But there are saints who take a special place in the Church, and in this Advent season, we have two particularly Christ-like heroes of the Faith to celebrate. The first, one of the most beloved in all of history, is St. Nicholas the Wonder-worker, Bishop of Myra. We may remember him from our childhood, a snowy-bearded bishop giving gifts, and we may know that people have given gifts in his honor for centuries in many parts of the world. Our St. Nicholas was a bold figure, who fiercely defended the true faith against the Arians (who taught that Jesus Christ was less than the

Son of God). He gave his money to rescue orphans from slavery and confronted murderers. His prayers saved sailors and turned the hearts of emperors. He is the standard for all bishops and pastors. His feast day is on December 6.

And on December 13, we commemorate our Venerable Father Herman of Alaska, who "firmly planted" the Cross in America. He resembles St. Nicholas: a lover of children, a protector of orphans and the helpless against those who would abuse them for their own profit, a man of strength and fearlessness but also of deep prayerfulness, a wonder worker who protected many from the wrath of the sea through his bold prayers to God. He is our father in Orthodox faith in America, the first saint in America to be canonized. And we are privileged to have a shrine to St. Herman in our own church.

These saints shine beyond any of us, but they have much to offer us. First of all, why not call upon the saints for daily help? We are still struggling to find a way through the tangles and snares of life, but the saints are champion marathon runners who have finished the race and know all its challenges. We are constantly surrounded by a "great cloud of witnesses," the Apostle Paul writes (Hebrews 12.1) who would strengthen and encourage us, if only we would remember them. Despite trials and seeming defeats, these two brave and holy men kept the faith and in the end won the victory, through Jesus Christ. Thanks in part to St. Nicholas, Orthodoxy was not overcome by the false teachings of Arius, and thanks

in part to St. Herman, the same Orthodox Church is now established in America.

This Advent, as we await the day of Christ's coming in the flesh, we need a share in the courage and perseverance of these saints. We know very well the obstacles in our way. But do we know the strength of God that works through his holy ones? Do we know his saints?

Yours in Christ,



Around the Parish

Thanks go to our **many volunteer efforts** last month: for the Thanksgiving feast, the Brotherhood Winter Clothing Give-Away, the parish clean-up which filled a whole dumpster, and the Thanksgiving deliveries to ten families!

We are in the midst of **the Nativity Fast**. This season prepares us for the Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ. As the shop displays and catalogs already warn us, Christmas is approaching fast. For the world around us, this means a frenzy of shopping, decorating, and partying. If we would enter into the blessings God has set before us, we need to begin a different sort of labor: being mindful of God for the gift of his Son and showing gratitude in every aspect of life. We observe the Nativity Fast by refraining from meat and rich foods, by prayer and confession, and giving to the needy. May we be blessed with peace!

For the feast day of **St. Nicholas**, we will celebrate an akathist service on Tuesday, Dec. 5, at 6 PM. The service is a poetic celebration of the whole life and character of St. Nicholas. It is not long and quite simple. Come and rejoice!

All children are invited to participate in our annual **St. Nicholas Celebration** after the Liturgy on Sunday, Dec. 10. We will have the story of St. Nicholas' life, fun activities and crafts, special treats and a mysterious festal visitor!

For the beloved American saint, our **Venerable Father Herman of Alaska**, we will celebrate Vespers and Liturgy on Tuesday, Dec. 12, at 6 PM.

Information for the **Christmas Flower Fundraiser** has been mailed out. Please contribute to the beautification of our church, in remembrance of your loved ones.

Looking ahead to our celebration of the **Nativity of the Lord**: we celebrate the Christmas Vigil on Christmas Eve at 4 PM, and the Divine Liturgy on Christmas Day at 9:30 AM. We will have our usual weekend services as well, when we hear the prophecies that foretold Christ's birth.

Please remember that, if severe weather conditions force **church service or event cancellations**, announcements will be posted on WFSB (channel 3) and WNBC/WVIT (channel 30), as well as on our own parish website: <www.sspeter-paul.org>.