

Rector's Letter, December, 2019

Dear brothers and sisters:

This coming year marks the fiftieth anniversary of the canonization of the first saint in North America: Saint Herman of Alaska. Our parish is blessed to have a large icon of the life of St. Herman, with his relic. Father Hermon was part of the first missionary team sent to share the Gospel with the Aleuts of Alaska. Along the way, all the other, more experienced members fell ill, turned aside to other work, or died. St. Herman, a humble and junior monk, was left alone on Kodiak island. He was no linguist or theologian, so he simply built a small hermitage in the woods and lived as a monk alongside the Aleuts, who came to love and revere him as Grandfather or "Apa" Herman. When St. Innocent arrived after his death, to establish a Church in this land, he found a people already honoring the God to whom St. Herman dedicated his life, and they were eager to learn more.

2020 is also the fiftieth anniversary of the granting of autocephaly to the Orthodox Church in America. Obviously, we still have much work to do to bring about a united witness in America, but the OCA is committed to humbly holding fast to that vision. Our Synod of Bishops has published a Proclamation on these two anniversaries, found at the end of the newsletter.

For SS. Peter & Paul, we may be tempted to imagine we cannot make a difference, or that the cultural and linguistic barriers with others are too great. But St. Herman showed us that God blesses us when we simply refuse to be discouraged from living out the Gospel: to love the Lord with all our heart and to love the people we meet, no matter how unfamiliar and no matter how we find them.

Yours in Christ,



Around the Parish

John Wigglesworth departed this life last month, having been surrounded by his family. May his memory be eternal!

We are grateful for the **new children's icon stands** for our church. John Barone built the stands and donated for the icons for them, in memory of His Eminence, Archbishop Nikon. Sarah Massaro donated the cost of the materials for the stands in memory of her parents, Rufus and Edith Nichols. Memory eternal!

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 Thursday, Dec. 5, at 6 PM. The service is a simple and poetic celebration of the whole life and character of St. Nicholas. Come and rejoice!

All children are invited to participate in our annual **St. Nicholas Celebration** after the Liturgy on Sunday, Dec. 8. We will have the story of St. Nicholas' life, a festive coffee hour and a mysterious festal visitor!

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

We are planning a **Christmas Carol Sing** during coffee hour on Sunday, Dec. 15.

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. On Sunday, Dec. 23, at 6 PM, we will also celebrate Vespers from the Eve of the Nativity, when we hear the prophecies that foretold Christ's birth.

New Year's Day is also a feast celebrated in our church: **The Circumcision of the Lord**. This

day commemorates the eighth day from the Nativity of the Lord, when he was actually given the name "Jesus." The Church still has prayers for the Eighth Day of a child's birth, to name that child before God. Come celebrate the feast and pray for the new year, with Vespers & Liturgy at 5:00, Monday, Dec. 31.

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.sspeterpaul.org>.

**Proclamation of the
Holy Synod of Bishops of the
Orthodox Church in America
Announcing the Anniversary
Celebrations for the Canonization of
St. Herman of Alaska,
and the Reception of the Tomos
of Autocephaly**

**To the beloved clergy, venerable monastics,
and pious laity of the Orthodox Church in
America; to all Orthodox Christians so-
journing in North America; to all men and
women of goodwill!**

We beseech our heavenly Father, the Author
of every good gift, to grant to everyone who

hears and reads these words an outpouring of the great and manifold gifts of faith, knowledge, and salvation that can only be found in Him. Through the revelation of Him in the person of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, may our faith in Him become ever greater, our knowledge of him more profound, and may we all attain unto the salvation that He alone offers. From of old the great Prophet David has exhorted God's faithful people, "Know that the Lord is God! It is he that made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture (Ps 100.3)." Our Great God has created us, and made himself known to us, and we have become his people, the Church. While the members of our Church live and work in Canada, the United States, and Mexico, they and we are united with the men and women throughout the world and from all the ages who share the same Catholic faith that was delivered to the Apostles once for all time. On behalf of this faith, we labor; for this knowledge, we rejoice; to this salvation, we hope.

In 2020, the Orthodox Church in America will celebrate the anniversary of two foundational events in her history: the reception of the Tomos of Autocephaly from the Venerable Russian Orthodox Church, and the canonization of Our Venerable Father Herman, Elder and Wonderworker of Alaska. We, the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Orthodox Church in America, give glory to God for these wonderful gifts that have allowed the Church to take root in North America, and invite all Orthodox Christians, indeed, every per-

son of goodwill to join our Church in our celebrations.

Throughout this anniversary year, the Orthodox Church in America will honor our Venerable Father Herman of Alaska. The Psalmist assures us that "God is glorified in the council of his saints (Ps 89.7)," and so as we celebrate this holy man, St. Herman, as we come to know his deeds, and works, and words, all of us will come to know evermore the glory of God revealed in him. We exhort everyone to come to this same knowledge, to have their faith strengthened and nourished by honoring this great saint for all Orthodox Christians. Our Venerable Father Herman of Alaska stands as a patron for all Orthodox Christians in America according to the inscrutable providence of God. He was a simple monk, but he serves as a great example for all Christians. He was well versed in the scriptures and the traditions of the Church. He maintained an ardent faith in Jesus Christ. He acted as a protector and defender of the downtrodden, the weak, the widows, the orphans. He labored in the fields of evangelization of the native Alaskans—people of this continent. Blessed is our God who has raised up this simple monk, our Father Herman, as a great and highly exalted man of God, who even now serves the faithful as the brilliantly shining North Star, guiding the Church to the salvation given by our Lord Jesus Christ.

The autocephaly of the Orthodox Church in America also provides a moment for all Orthodox Christians to celebrate. The venerable Russ-

ian Orthodox Church gave the Tomos of Autocephaly to the Orthodox Church in America with the hope that this Tomos and the autocephaly it gave “might serve the good” of Orthodox Christians in North America. The Orthodox Church in America remains committed to this good, the canonical normalization of our common ecclesial situation in North America, as a mandate. And it is to this good, the promise of the unity of all Orthodox Christians, we hope, but also, in these fractured times, we put forward as a reason for all the Orthodox Churches in North America to celebrate. There is one flock, because there is one Church. With this in mind, the Holy Synod of Bishops welcomes all Orthodox Christians to celebrate together with the Orthodox Church in America by recommitting to Orthodox unity in North America.

Since receiving the gift of autocephaly the Orthodox Church in America has continued to hold firm the faith of the Apostles, the faith of the Fathers, the faith of the Orthodox, the faith that makes fast the inhabited world. In our Churches, homes, Chapels, monasteries, seminaries, and institutions throughout the United States, Canada, and Mexico, our communities give glory, honor, and worship to the one God and Father, to our Holy Lord Jesus Christ, and to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Synod oversees Church life, ministering to the flock entrusted to it by the grace of God, with all canonical order and in fidelity to the tradition of the Church. At every level of ecclesial experience, our Church seeks to resolve its

internal problems in a conciliar manner with the fullness of the Church according to the tradition it has received. The Orthodox Church in America gives thanks to God for the great blessings he has given us, and also to the communion he has allowed us to maintain through our common faith with the other local Orthodox Churches.

In this coming year, the Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church in America is pleased to announce that these anniversaries will be marked by three Divine Liturgies concelebrated by the Holy Synod and guest hierarchs and clergy. The first will be at the Memorial Day Pilgrimage at St. Tikhon’s Monastery, May 25, 2020. The second will be take place during the annual pilgrimage to Spruce Island, Alaska, August 9, 2020. The third will be at St. Nicholas Cathedral in Washington, D.C., in conjunction with the Fall Regular Meeting of the Holy Synod, November 14, 2020. In addition to these Churchwide celebrations, dioceses and deaneries will also celebrate these anniversaries in different ways. We also look toward the publication of educational and liturgical works to mark these anniversaries.

Finally, we give thanks to God for His rich gifts he has bestowed upon us so that we might serve his glory: St. Herman, autocephaly, and the communion we have with all Orthodox Churches. We ask him to bless the Church we have been entrusted with as the Holy Synod, so that we might evermore praise, bless, and worship our One God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.