

Rector's Letter

September, 2020

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

“It’s better to give than to receive.” We’ve heard this saying so often, but it is difficult to think of it as anything more than a cliché. Receiving good things has obvious benefits: just ask a child on Christmas or a worker on payday. Being a consumer — with every business and organization seeking to fulfill your desires — seems like a great deal. And even in the Church, it often seems rather one-sided: we come to receive the words of Scripture, instruction, encouragement, and the Holy Mysteries themselves. Why not consume as much as we can?

The problem is that consumption leaves us empty. It is pleasant as long as it lasts, like a cheerful fire consuming the last of its fuel, but it eventually burns out and leaves only the ashes behind.

Now, we need to eat, to heat our homes, to travel, to work, and so some amount of “creative destruction” is necessary. But focusing our plans, dreams, ambitions, and lives around consumption is truly destructive. We are trying to make our identity out of the stuff we claim for ourselves, and in fact we just make ourselves smaller and smaller.

The real source of identity is what we give of ourselves: “You are what you give.” Life is a

course in becoming fully human, becoming what we were made to be. Being rich in possessions — wealth, yes, but also talents, experience, education, leisure, health, and every thing we call “our own” — adds up to very little at the end of our life, which is when we can be honestly judged for who we are. What truly testifies on that day is what we have done with our possessions, or, more properly, our God-given gifts. Did we consume them, use them up, and so consume the meaning of our life? Or did we recognize that every gift we had received was an opportunity to give of ourselves? Did we share in the divine work of giving and so grow into the persons we were created to be?

In other words, the judgment of our lives will be quite simple: did you love God with everything you have, and did you love your neighbor as yourself? Those are not small matters that we can accomplish in our spare time, that we can accomplish by fulfilling our minimum obligations. Everything that we treat as more important than serving God, everything we do without seeking to honor God with it is an idol that will lead to our destruction. And if we do not love our neighbor as God has shown love to us, we are not only dishonoring God, we are making an idol of ourselves. We take this idea of “Me” and build it up, and care for it and feed it, and consult self-help books and therapists about it, but it all will be consumed in the moment of our death. What lasts for all eternity is humble, hard-working, honest love. How that works out is of course the

fabric of our particular stories, but let's be sure to use the good material, as the Apostle Paul teaches us:

Brethren, you are God's building. According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire (1 Cor 3.9-15).

Long after our good looks, nice houses, comfortable bank accounts, or favorite TV shows are forgotten, what will endure throughout eternity are our brothers and sisters in the presence of God. This life is the time to show love for God and our neighbor. It has been given to us by God in his own unfailing love. Let's give thanks for the blessings we have received and share this divine

work of giving gifts. As we say each Divine Liturgy: "Your own of Your own, we offer to You, on behalf of all and for all!"

May God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the giver of every good thing, bless us and guide us with His Holy Spirit.

With love in Christ,



Around the Parish

We are happy to announce that His Beatitude, Metropolitan Tikhon has blessed our **"Phase 3" of Reopening, to increase maximum capacity in the church from 40 to 50 people.** We are making this change in light of the reasonable success of our reopening thus far. We have found that we can easily accommodate at least 50 people under COVID-19 measures, given how many attend as couples.

Increasing our maximum capacity means that our regular participants can continue to attend without needing to sign up every Sunday. If you are only able to attend occasionally, or if you are planning to attend for the first time, please do sign up for those Sundays when you can come:

<https://sspeterpaul.org/signup>

While fifty of us currently may come to worship in person each Sunday, **our parish community**

will continue to pray at home while gathering together online. Our parish website has the latest information: sspeterpaul.org/praying. The response so far has been enthusiastic, and more are welcome! We are delighted that some of our shut-ins have been able to join us as well.

All our gatherings for prayer use the following details:

SS. Peter & Paul: Praying Together

Please join our meeting from your computer, tablet or smartphone.

<https://www.gotomeet.me/JoshuaMosher/ss-peter--paul-praying-together>

You can also dial in using your phone.

United States (Toll Free): **1 877 309 2073**

Access Code: **333-540-349**

New to GoToMeeting? Get the app now and be ready when your first meeting starts:

<https://global.gotomeeting.com/install/333540349>

Please note: you do not need to sign up for a free trial or subscribe to GoToMeeting to participate. **The software is free for attendees.**

Please also note that you can call in!



Thanks go to Rick Comshaw, Radu Alecsandru, and other volunteers who have been applying their know-how and many hours to **setting up and improving our sound and video for streaming church services.** The quality of sound especially is much better, and more improvements are planned for coming weeks.

Fr. Joshua can make outdoor pastoral visits.

Under the more flexible rules of Phase 3 of our reopening, we can arrange for such visits for Confession, Communion for the sick, and other spiritual needs. We have already arranged meetings in people's back yards, or even under a tree outside the church! The usual safety measures in Connecticut apply. If you would like arrange such a visit, please contact Fr. Joshua at 203-237-4539 or email frjmosher@sspeterpaul.org.

We will celebrate the **Nativity of the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary** on Tuesday, Sept. 8. The birth of the Theotokos was the fulfillment of promises made by God to her righteous parents, and also the fulfillment of the hope of generations of people who put their trust in God, from Noah to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to King David and his line. The birth of the Theotokos represents the best the human race has to offer to our Creator, and God accepts this gift and returns her to us as the mother of our Savior. We will observe the feast with Great Vespers from home on Monday, Sept. 7, at 6 PM, and Divine Liturgy in the temple (and also streamed) on Tuesday at 9:30 AM.

The feast of the **Elevation of the Cross** is on Sept. 14. This feast honors first the finding of the Cross of our Lord by St. Helen, and then its recovery years later, after it had been captured by the Persians. In celebration, we lift up the life-giving Cross, so that we may bow down before the crucified Lord Jesus Christ, in whom we put all our trust. Given the COVID-19 limitations we are following, we will observe the feast on its eve, Sunday, Sept. 13, with special festal material added to the Sunday Liturgy.

Our first Christian Education event is on Sunday, September 13.

Whether you are able to participate in Divine Liturgy or not, feel free to come to church at 11 AM, at the close of the service and, weather permitting, we'll create (in a socially distant manner!) some chalk art on our steps to celebrate the Feast of Cross. This is an all ages activity; we'll be outside the entire time and doing everything according to COVID protocols, so come one, come all!

More broadly, we have found that our families need flexibility in Christian Education opportunities. We are publishing **The Vine, an education newsletter**, to support these efforts at



SS. Peter & Paul: the first issue is now posted on our website: sspeterpaul.org .

Online Christian education series: “Exploring Our Faith.” Join us any time as we explore important aspects of the Orthodox Christian Faith, inviting your own questions each session. We have sessions planned for **Tuesdays, Sept. 22 and 29, at 7:00.** We continue to use GoToMeeting, with the “Praying Together” details shared above.

Sign Up for Parish News: Everyone in the parish is invited to sign up for our Parish News list. We established it at the beginning of the year as a fresh way to communicate. Now that we are confronting the necessity of quarantines and “social distancing,” it’s a valuable tool for our community to stay connected. **You can sign up for Parish News on our Contact page:** <https://sspeterpaul.org/contact> .

You can also follow our parish on Facebook. We have shared a steady stream of news and other material on our page: facebook.com/saintspeterandpaulmeriden/ .

We welcome your donations and pledges, which can be mailed to SS. Peter & Paul Orthodox Church, PO Box 334, Meriden CT 06450. We are grateful for your continued support of the work of our parish, which has continued even during the lockdown, and even has expanded into new areas, like our online ministries. Thank you!