

Rector's Letter

February, 2021

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

The Orthodox Christian Faith is not the easiest to embrace. It demands a lot of us: long services, fasting and prayer, disciplines and rules, and I'm sure we could name plenty more. As we hear one more time, "Again and again, in peace let us pray to the Lord"; as we are called one more time to fast or come to confess our sins; as we find one more way that Orthodoxy does not fit in with normal American ways; we may ask, "Why do we bother?"

God knows what is on our minds; so why do we need to pray again and again? God does not benefit from our fasts; so why fast? God sees our secret sins; so why confess? Why do anything beyond the minimum we feel is necessary?

But Valentine's Day, coming in just a couple of weeks, gives us a clue. A holiday to celebrate love? It seems a little silly, perhaps. But a husband who fails to do something that says, "I love you," is probably making a serious mistake! In fact, we make a statement, whether we like to or not, every day of a marriage. If we are mindful and conscientious, we act in ways big and small that show our love; and truly, it is the regularity and faithfulness that matters most. If we don't think to act in these ways, it says — whether we mean

it or not — that our spouse is not important, not worthy of attention.

In fact, this principle extends to all our relationships. The way we treat those around us says many things: what we think of those people, yes; but even more, what we are like, ourselves. More than that, these ways of treating people shape who we truly are. If we constantly complain and criticize, we become increasingly embittered, and find it hard to be grateful for anything. If we make a point of giving thanks, though, we find it easier to be at peace, even during troubles. If we think of ways to be charitable to those around us, we become more open to the gifts of God's grace.

And that is why we bother with all the demands of Orthodoxy. It is a straight and narrow road, like marriage. A glamorous wedding may seem very appealing, with a beautiful couple, wealth, style, paparazzi and all the rest. But the glamorous couples hardly ever hold their marriages together when life gets difficult.

Lasting marriages are built on the willingness to faithfully and patiently act in love toward one another, no matter what. They involve doing many of the same things again and again, day after day. They involve sacrifice. They involve saying some obvious but essential words: "Please"; "Thank you"; "I'm sorry"; "I forgive you"; "I love you." If we put our heart behind them and show by our actions that we mean them, they never get old. In fact, we can become better husbands and wives, and find that we love each other more sincerely.

Doesn't church sound a lot like this, too? The Church was not established for God's sake but for ours, to help us become better human beings, that is, more like Jesus Christ. We repeat ourselves because the words still need saying, for our own sake. We fast and pray because it draws us closer to God. We sacrifice time for church services, prayer, and works of love because these help shape our minds and hearts to know God better, to draw into closer communion with God and his saints.

The mystery is that, if we turn from asking, "Why bother?" to asking, "Why not?" we find joy in the same things that were drudgery before. If we wash the dishes in a spirit of complaint, we hate the work, but if we wash them as an offering of love, we find it rather easy. If we pray in a spirit of complaint, we hate that work, too. But if we find the way to be thankful and put our love for God into action, we find that our burden becomes light.

With love in Christ,



Around the Parish

We welcome **Thom Knox as well as Elena Kallestinova and Timur Yarovinsky** (and their daughters **Kristina and Veronica** off at

college) who have all joined our parish in recent weeks. May God grant them many blessed years!

The feast of the **Meeting of the Lord in the Temple** is on Feb. 2. This is the day when our Lord Jesus Christ was brought into the temple as a forty-day-old child by his parents. There the Righteous Simeon testified that he saw the promised salvation of Israel fulfilled: "Lord, now let your servant depart in peace, for my eyes have seen your salvation...." We sing his prayer of thanksgiving at every service of Vespers. We will observe the Meeting of the Lord this year with Vespers (online only) on the eve, Monday, Feb. 1, at 6 PM, and Divine Liturgy in the temple and streamed online on Tuesday, Feb. 2, at 9:30 AM.

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. This month, we will meet on **Tuesday, Feb. 16, at 7:00.** We continue to use GoTo-Meeting, with the "Praying Together" on our website: <https://sspeterpaul.org/praying>

Children's education this month: We will have an online session after the Liturgy on Sun., Feb. 16.

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>.