



dren. We are blessed with a shrine with a relic of St. Herman on the right side of our church. We will celebrate his feast with Great Vespers at 6 PM on Monday, Dec. 12, and Divine Liturgy at 9:30 AM on Tuesday, Dec. 13.

Looking ahead to our celebration of the **Nativity of the Lord**: we celebrate the Christmas Vigil on Christmas Eve at 5 PM, and the Divine Liturgy on Christmas Day at 9:30 AM. On Friday, 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.

We are gathering for the **Royal Hours of Nativity** at 6 PM, Wednesday and Thursday, Dec. 21 and 22. The Hour prayed just before the Divine Liturgy on Sundays follows the same structure as these Royal Hours, but for the feast we add special readings and hymns. This service is meant to be observed as a unit just before Christmas Eve, but we will pray half each evening of the Forefeast of the Nativity, hearing the psalms, readings, prayers and hymns that prepare us to receive Christ.

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>.

Rector's Letter, December, 2022

Dear brothers and sisters:

We are in the midst of the Nativity Fast, the forty days before the feast of the Nativity of the Lord. While everything around us demands we rush, buy, be jolly and merry, and party, the Church calls to calm and quiet ourselves, repent and pray, give to those in need, and above all fast—eat less and eat simply. Especially at this time, we may really struggle to fast. Why does our Faith fast so much?

We can start by remembering our first mother and

father, who failed to keep a simple fast: not to eat the fruit of one tree out of all the Garden of Eden. Because they chose not to embrace God's commandment of life, they lost Paradise.



The commandment was a gift: to give them an opportunity to submit themselves faithfully to their Creator, to live out their proper role under his Lordship. Living in the aftermath of their disobedience, we are prey to all kinds of suffering, pain, toil, injustice, sickness, and death.

Worse still, we are vulnerable to every kind of desire, each insisting that it be fed or we will surely die. And so we are given another gift: to practice together to put those appetites in their proper place, and to learn from Christ that “man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord” (Deut. 8:3; Matt. 4:4; Luke 4:4).

Our own forty-day Fast is set in imitation of our Lord’s forty days fasting in the wilderness, where he rebuked Satan the tempter with these very words. And the original instruction in Deuteronomy was given to explain the importance of the manna the Israelites had relied upon in their forty years in the wilderness—they literally lived upon the word of the Lord.

For us, we can panic if we have to skip a couple of meals. It takes so little effort to acquire a mountain of food in the United States, that our nation’s concern has shifted from actual starvation to malnutrition and obesity. We constantly hear advice on dieting, healthy ingredients, the origins of our food, and portion size. To fast, though, is truly counter-cultural. We are turning away from self-improvement and self-fulfillment toward something unfamiliar: humble obedience. We are given some basic instructions and invited to struggle together in keeping them.

We can be encouraged in our fasting by Daniel and the Three Holy Youths (Daniel 1:5–20). The king ordered his chief steward to choose some of the best of the children of Israel to serve in his court and learn the language and customs. And as a sign of special favor, the king gave these youths delicacies

Thanks also to everyone who participated in our **Thanksgiving deliveries** to six neighborhood families in need, and those who have contributed to the **Charity Fund**, which supports loving efforts like this.

Our **Annual Parish Meeting** is planned for Sunday, Dec. 4. Reports will be distributed in mid-November.

Last month, we had our first “**Saturday Vespers, Supper and Fellowship,**” and we had a great turn-out. We are planning our next for Saturday, Dec. 17, beginning with Great Vespers at 5 PM. Join us for a simple supper after evening worship. Free for all, but please let Fr. Joshua know who’s coming. Bring a hobby to engage in, or just stay and converse. Bring a friend!

We will celebrate the Feast of **St. Nicholas the Wonderworker, Bishop of Myra**, with Great Vespers at 6 PM on Monday, Dec. 5, and Divine Liturgy at 9:30 AM on Tuesday, Dec. 6. St. Nicholas, an exemplary archpastor who has shown the powerful love of God for those in distress and need and especially for children, is beloved throughout the world. Come and rejoice.

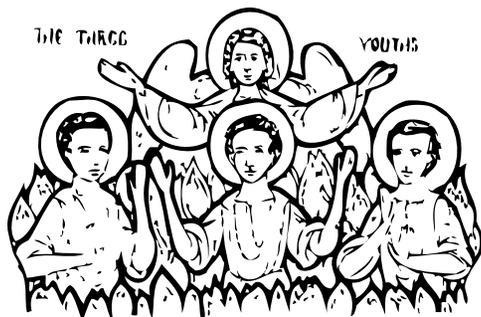
A week later, we keep the memory of **St. Herman of Alaska**, first-canonized of American saints. He also was a man of prayer who protected the needy and had special love of chil-



sires, and to become more truly the persons God had called them to be. May our own fasting be as fruitful.

Yours in Christ,

Fr. Joseph S. Moshir



Around the Parish

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. If we would enter into the blessings God has set before us, we need to be mindful of God for the gift of his Son and show 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!

Thank to all who hosted our **Thanksgiving Feast** last month! We had a tremendous turn-out and a great time together.

from his own table and a portion of the wine he had drunk. “But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king’s delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself” Dan 1:8.

Presumably Daniel—and his friends, the Three Holy Youths—sought to follow the dietary prescriptions of the Old Covenant. But avoiding the wine that the king himself had also drunk suggests something more: “Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips. Do not incline my heart to any evil thing, to practice wicked deeds with men who work iniquity; and let me not eat of their delicacies” (Psalm 140:3-4). We are so often blind to the hazards of “unholy communion.” We flee from trans fats, but what possible spiritual harm could come through the door of my lips?

Unlike with the story of the furnace, the children here are treated with great patience: “The chief of the eunuchs said to Daniel, ‘I fear my lord the king, who has appointed your food and drink. For why should he see your faces looking worse than the young men who are your age? Then you would endanger my head before the king’” (Dan. 1:10).

In one verse, we have so many of the temptations to abandon fasting! The people we fear and respect won’t like it. Fasting will harm your body, your health, your good looks. It will even cause trouble for others—how many struggle with unsympathetic family members!

But Daniel disarms the worries of the servant:

So Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, "Please test your servants for ten days, and let them give us vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then let our appearance be examined before you, and the appearance of the young men who eat the portion of the king's delicacies; and as you see fit, so deal with your servants." So he consented with them in this matter, and tested them ten days. And at the end of ten days their features appeared better and fatter in flesh than all the young men who ate the portion of the king's delicacies. Thus the steward took away their portion of delicacies and the wine that they were to drink, and gave them vegetables (Dan. 1:11-15).

These youths have health and beauty that comes not from worrying about appearance, but from holiness. There are similar stories of many saints radiant with beauty, in the midst of ascetic effort.

This little test reminds me of the Lord's words in Malachi on robbing God of the tithe: "Bring in the full tithe and see if I do not open for you the window of heaven and pour such blessing that there will not be room to receive it all!" (see Malachi 3:10) The Lord used Daniel and his friends to make a similar demonstration of his superabundant response to a faithful offering.

And that is what is so intriguing about fasting: it is *receiving* a gift from God which doesn't seem to the

material eye much of a gift, and it is *offering* back to God as well. How can we offer *not doing* something? But if, like Daniel, we are freely choosing not to eat out of loving obedience, then the fasting itself is a concrete sign of love and even thankfulness.

Obviously, there are many other hazards to fasting. The Church warns us against pride or judgmentalism. We are told not to ignore charity or "devour our brother" while refraining from meat. Much like the tithe, our fasting is meant to be a portion signifying the whole of our life, fed by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord!

Here is how Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah ended their "fast":

Now at the end of the days, when the king had said that they should be brought in, the chief of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. Then the king interviewed them, and among them all none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah; therefore they served before the king. And in all matters of wisdom and understanding about which the king examined them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers who were in all his realm (Dan. 1:16-18).

The Lord was not content with blessing only their physical condition, but filled them with heavenly and earthly wisdom. In fact, it was precisely this early ascetical effort that prepared the Holy Youths for the great trials they would later face. It allowed them to defeat empty promises and destructive de-