

**Edited from a publication on “Stewardship” - Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese.**

Giving is only truly giving if it is done in the love of Christ. We are told to love the Lord our God with all our heart, to love our neighbor as ourselves, and to love one another as Christ has loved us. Giving for any lesser reason is a perversion of the Gospel. St. Basil the Great said that this life is no accident, but is a training ground to learn to know God. This is so relevant to our giving. How shall we apply Christ’s law of love to our giving in Christian stewardship? There are three major issues in giving: *motives, methods, and results*. If we internalize what our sources have to say on these themes for our lives and our parishes, we will do well! It is the good news of the Gospel that should motivate us to give! God shows His love to us daily - He has shown His love in everything any of us has now, has ever had, or will ever have. Take a breath. You breathed oxygen? Now, say, “Thank you God!” Still have a job or a pension? Say, “Thank you God!” Got a family? “Thank you God!” Are you getting or continuing an education? “Thank God!” Get the idea? Saying “Thank you God” repetitively – and meaning it – is a good thing to do. But what should be our further response to God’s love for us? We are to do for others as God has done for us. He loves us and gives to us - so, we are to love and give.

Occasionally people will say something along the lines of, “There are no standards of giving in the Orthodox Church.” **That’s nonsense.** God’s precepts, rules or standards for us are “pledging, tithing and offering.” Scripture and the teaching of the Fathers testify to these three standards. **1) Pledging** is “promising to give tithes and offerings throughout the year,” and it dates to the 5th century BC, when the people of God promised in a written document to give *tithes and offerings*. Today, pledging makes budgeting and planning possible for the parish. **2) Tithing** is giving ten percent - a tenth, of one’s annual income. The first biblical instance of this is Abraham’s tithe to Melchizedek (2000 B.C.) Tithing actually predates both Judaism and Christianity, and is found in both religions. The Orthodox are not exempt. Tithing has always been a way to express one’s commitment to God. “Tithing” appears 37 times in the Old and New Testaments. Tithing is giving directly to the “**storehouse**”, which today is the parish general operating fund. Tithing is based on a comparatively simple calculation - moving the decimal point one place to the left on our total income, and then writing a check. **3) Offering** is to give or sacrifice or present something to God as a mark of respect and love. We are to “come and present our offering.” “Offering” appears 710 times in the Bible! **Offerings are our gifts to God.** Choices about giving offerings are matters of individual prayer and determination, about giving from the heart. Many people ask, how much should I give to the church and to the priest for a wedding, baptism, funeral, panikhida or any other ‘personal’ service. There is no ‘set price’ – you are to give from your heart. Freely and generously and this is also how you should give weekly or for special offerings like the renovation fund.

Giving money is definitely not all there is to stewardship. Stewardship is also participating in church organizations, volunteering, and helping the priest in his ministry. Remember, you answer directly to God for your own choices. After discussing the requirements of God, St. John Chrysostom makes this comment **that all tithe**: from widows and orphans to the rich, male and female, young and old. We need to make a habit of giving as God has instructed us. We have considered *motives* and *methods* and we have but one more thing to discuss, *results*. The results of giving are three: blessings to people, thanksgiving to God, and challenges to us. As Orthodox, we choose, with God’s help, to love and to obey Him. “Give and it will be given to you.” Jesus said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive”. From the perspective of the giver this joy is an

incredible blessing, impossible to describe to a non-giver; one must experience it. Try it. Remember, the tithe is not a **tax nor dues**, so never suggest to anyone that he or she “owes” any fixed amount! The tithe, offering or donation comes from a person’s own personal choice. Incredible as it seems, studies have shown, a medium size parish like ours would be able to sustain a yearly budget of over one million dollars if people truly gave, openly and honestly. With God’s help it really can be done! Think about it!

**Renovation Fund Addition: \$1,527** Already **Seraphim**, Mila Romenskaya and Anna Romenskaya (Azora Realty) added to their total; new **Seraphim**: Alexei & Tatiana Levkovsky. From Archangels to **Cherubim**, Christoph & Ekaterina Evangelidi; Family Dziubina new **Cherubims!** Olga McMillan goes from Angel’s Friend to **Angel. Thank you & God bless you!**

**From Father** - I have been asked to respond to the following two questions:

**What is Kutiya/Koliva?** ‘Kutiya’ or ‘Koliva’ is the name given to the mixture of boiled wheat or rice, sugar and other ingredients (such as raisins, almonds, candies and spices) which are presented at Memorial Services (Panikhidas) and/or funerals. It is an old tradition, basically forgotten today, for members of the parish as they eat the Kutiya/Koliva to say, ‘May God forgive him/her!’ Early on wheat became a symbol of the resurrection, based on Christ’s word, ‘Truly, truly I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit’. In areas where wheat was sparse, rice was traditionally used. Russians who immigrated to China brought this tradition with them to America, but it began centuries before. The sugar is added as a prayer that the deceased’s resurrection will be a sweet one and pleasant one. Candy, almonds and raisins are also a part of this sweetness and are instrumental in the decoration of the Kutiya/Koliva as well. Thus, the Kutiya/Koliva is a symbol of our faith and prayer for the beloved deceased person. It is especially significant because each person shares in the symbol not only as part of the service, but also through consuming some of the Kutiya/Koliva, and offering a personal prayer for the deceased.”

**Are we supposed to kiss the priest’s hand?**

The practice of kissing the priest’s hand is in the same category of liturgical acts as the reverencing of the holy icons and the cross. The Orthodox Church explains that when we kiss an icon or the cross, we are not worshipping or adoring the wood, paint, metal, etc., of which they are formed, but that which they represent. So it is with kissing the priest’s hand. This act is a liturgical act through which we show respect, not so much for the individual priest as a person, as we do for the priesthood in general and the sacramental life of the Church. Many clergy and laity have departed from the essence of the matter, and begun to make changes, especially in America. However, within the context of the Church, it is proper to show respect by kissing the hand and asking a blessing of the priest, bishop or monastic (male or female.) It is important understand this tradition from the liturgical standpoint in order to be comfortable with it.

**Liturgy each Sunday 10AM. July 26, Molebien to the healer St. Panteleimon after Liturgy.**

**Happy Name Day to all our beloved parishioners named Vladimir!!! (July 17, Righteous Apostle, St. Vladimir.)**