

God Gives the Growth

Looking back in order to look foreword...

"So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. He who plants and he who waters are equal, and each shall receive his wages according to his labor. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building. According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and another man is building upon it. Let each man take care how he builds upon it. For no other foundation can any one lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any one builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw- each man's work will become manifest; for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work which any man has built on the foundations survives, he will receive a reward (1Corinthians 3:7-14).

It is all too easy to give ourselves credit at this monumental time in our history. St. Paul was compelled to check the very human response to success as something attributed to man and not God. Indeed, it is clear in scripture that God uses both the just and unjust to accomplish His Divine Will. God's actions in the world are not dependent upon us. The caution St. Paul gave to the Corinthians is quite appropriate for us at this time. We are the laborers but it is God Who gives growth.

A seed requires for growth just the right soil, balanced with all the necessary nutrients, appropriate sunlight and the right amount of water. Then, something of miracle takes place. Hidden within the seed is abundant life and strength that has the potential for growth a million times its original size with the ability to reproduce itself for thousands of years. It is from within the seed that life and growth occur. It is the same way with the Church. The church is planted and cared for by God's holy people but the miracle of growth belongs to God's grace.

The manner in which a Church labors determines true success. Success is not measured by *what* we build, but by what we *become*. Christians are called to become a family in Christ. In the Church, there are not strangers, enemies or adversaries, just opportunities for change and growth. Attending Church is not a way of expanding one's business opportunities, advancing up the ladder of prestige, or leaving a legacy to ourselves. The Church is *people* following Christ and laboring as a community that is to reflect heaven on earth.

Assumption Greek Orthodox Church has survived and flourished not because of our state of the art facilities, but because of the state of our hearts. People thirst after living a life that lifts us to heaven and carries our soul among the righteous. After a liturgy, we should leave inspired, strengthened, and motivated to serve Christ and to labor together to build up His Church.

Any form of spiritual discipline (no matter how pious it may seem) that leads to alienation, insensitivity and selfishness is not blessed by the Church. We do not climb up

the ladder of perfection for our own personal spiritual enlightenment, but for the uniting of our souls and hearts with others so that we might become one mind and heart in Christ.

The Church is love because God is love. Every step in the history of a community is marked by its ability to love. So many doors open when we allow ourselves to love as Christ has loved us. A community that experiences the forgiveness of God passes on His mercy allowing healing to take place. The real labor of the Church is to manifest God's love on earth.

Every one of us, by virtue of being members of the body of Christ, is entrusted with the sacred task of building up the Church. From as early as 1984, a vision for a new Orthodox Church in Scottsdale was planted and since that time, has been nurtured and cared for by people of faith, hope and love.

On August 15, 1988 Bishop Anthony celebrated the first service at Assumption Greek Orthodox Church and assigned its first priest, Fr. David Wright. In 1989, His Grace appointed Fr. Chris Margaritis who served the community for the next five years. In March of 1995, I was assigned by Metropolitan Anthony. Each priest is indebted to the next because all labored to build the Church with love.

On December 6, 1998 the feast of St. Nicholas, Assumption celebrated its Building Campaign of Faith, Hope and Love. Since that time, Assumption received over one million dollars in pledges from just 100 families. This extraordinary accomplishment is the fruit of a community that has placed its faith in Christ and His Church as the foundation of all that we do. It's a testimony to a united vision of being the Church, loving one another, and laboring for Christ.

Congratulations, Assumption community! Through us, God has planted the seed and given it growth. May we continue to nurture that which God has entrusted us.

In Christ's Love,
+ Fr. Andrew