

The Joy of Giving-Come & See

"It is well-known that the main goal of the Church is to bring to her fold all people for the salvation of their souls...mission is not just one of the works of the Church, but it is her basic ministry for the renewal and transformation of the world, of all peoples and all nations, so that they may become so-inheritors and co-participants of the kingdom of Jesus Christ through His gospel." (Fr. Ignatius of India)

Living in the comfort of America during economically prosperous times, it is not difficult to become self-occupied and indifferent to the needs of others. In an effort to remind us of our essential calling as Christians, the OCMC (Orthodox Christian Missions Center) is sponsoring a national lecture tour of Fr. Ignatius of India - Assumption will be his stop for the Southwest.

The Orthodox communities have been invited to Assumption on Thursday evening, October 26, at 7:00 PM to meet Fr. Ignatius and to see his work. Video and slide presentations will bring his dynamic ministry to life.

Church tradition teaches that the Apostle Thomas was a priest-monk from Egypt. He translated services and the liturgy into the local Bengali dialect and built a small church. In 1990 Fr. Athanasios was laid to rest in West Bengali. The very next year, Fr. Ignatius Sennis, a priest-monk from Greece, went to India in order to continue the work begun by Fr. Athanasios.

West Bengali is under communist regime and forbids by law any missionary activities. The only way to proceed was with discretion and great caution. The converts often faced contempt from family and friends who are predominantly Hindu. Fr. Ignatius travels to remote villages, providing medical help, distribution of clothing, opportunities for education, celebrating the liturgy and baptizing new Christians. At the heart of much of his activity is caring for the poor. This is how Fr. Ignatius describes the plight of the people in West Bengali.

"Millions are homeless, living in the streets, with only some rags for their possessions. Like the poor Lazarus in the parable, so do these people live in poverty, hunger, and disease, side by side with dogs and rats.... How can we sleep in peace when we hear a baby across the street crying because of fever, or when the monsoon rains fall mercilessly on a homeless family that looks in vain for shelter? How can we rest in our cool rooms and comfortable beds when our brothers and sisters, creatures of God, are baking in the hot tropical sun in the streets and sidewalks for days, months and years? Life for these people has no yesterday or tomorrow. There is only today.... How can we respond to this abyss of human suffering? Where do we start? We are responsible to try with all our strength, with the hope that our all-merciful Lord and the God fearing faithful from all over the globe will be our supporters both materially and morally."
(Fr. Ignatius)

It's difficult, after reading his words, to not think differently about the comfort we all enjoy.

Some parishioners have expressed to me the strain felt from supporting the Church with Stewardship, the Building Fund and charities. No one should ever feel pressured to give beyond their means, however: the question must be asked- what is driving people to do so much? The pressure is self-inflicted. It is the fruit of a life being given totally to Christ with faith that is inspiring and enables many to give and keep on giving with joy. Sometimes it takes a Fr. Ignatius to awaken and renew our spirit so that self-preoccupation does not bury its seed of hardness in our hearts. The core of the Gospel of the Christ and His great 11th Commandment is that Christians are to love one another as Christ has loved us. There is nothing that should take precedence over this new commandment of Christ. The Church is not here on earth to serve us but it is here for us to serve the world and manifest the love of Christ to all. Being a "true" Orthodox is a matter of one's heart.

Come, see and experience the joy Fr. Ignatius has in giving of himself to Christ in the ministry. I hope the joy of giving continues to spread throughout our community and that we may never forget what it means to be the Church. As Fr. Ignatius has said: *"Let us ask ourselves: Are we responding to God's will responsibly and honestly? The ways we can help are many. God presents us with plenty of opportunities when there is good will... Even if we pass the word to our fellow man about the mission, that is a valuable offering. The most needed offering one can make is a heartfelt prayer for those who are serving missions around the world, and for those not in the Light, so that they too can become members of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church."*

In Christ's Love
+ Fr. Andrew