

## **State of the Church Address: December 15, 1996**

*God Out-Gives Us As Long As We Make the Effort to Out-Give Him*

*(Matthew 6:25-36) "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add one cubit to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O men of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek all these things; and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well."*

I chose this passage to begin my remarks to you today because they speak to the heart of what I would like to say. The passage assures us that God knows what we truly need and if He provides for animals how much more then does he provide for us who have been created after His image and likeness. This past year has been a witness to God's providing for His Church here at Assumption. The accomplishments are rather miraculous when one thinks about all that has been done and occurred.

When the exterior of our Church became worn, God sent volunteers to paint it. Workers were enabled to be hired because of Your stewardship offerings. When our parking lot needed dust control, God sent a nice Forman working for the city who graciously paved our lot for free. When there was a space problem, God sent a carpenter who donated thousands of dollars worth of work and in a week's time the job was done. When our children needed a place to play God sent another carpenter, a couple of volunteers and a tractor to get the job done - again for free. When it came time to re-carpet the Church, in a matter of two weeks we had collected over \$2,500. When it came time to put a new floor in the altar, a tile contractor came forward and donated his talents to install it. At Mother's Day we raised over \$1,800 to benefit the orphans living at Project Mexico. At Thanksgiving when others were in need, we raised over \$800 and provided Thanksgiving meals for over 20 families.

God always out gives us as long as we make the effort to out-give Him. When everything is added up, our giving totals over \$105,000 for 1996. \$62,000 of which has come from Stewardship. When you combine the Tray Collections and Candle Offerings that were made throughout the year - we have collected over \$85,665. Our giving reflects a congregation that is maturing in its commitment and faith to God - we must give if we are to receive.

Our financial status is only one aspect of our existence. Divine Providence however, is best seen in a more sublime setting - that of our Liturgical Life and Celebration. God's Kingdom present in worship is the provision without which we would have no purpose. Faithfully, every Sunday we have been gathering and celebrating our New Life in Christ. Hearing everyone participate in the worship services has brought me great joy. How I would grieve when I perceive a congregation that passively participates in the worship. Visitors to our community have always commented on the beauty of our worship and how wonderful it is that everyone sings. A visitor writes:

*"It was wonderful to participate in the Liturgy when we were visiting in Arizona in May. . . It was also a pleasant experience to visit such a hospitable community. May our Almighty God continue to bless you all in your endeavors. Our thoughts, prayers and good wishes are with you."* (Nov. 96)

The beauty of our worship comes from taking it seriously and praying the liturgy with all our strength.

When I asked my son Evan, why do we go to Church on Sundays he said, "Because its a special house." I then asked him, "Why is it special?" He responded by saying, "Its the house where Jesus lives." This year our children have been involved in an intensive course on prayer that will continue until June. It is because they are praying the Liturgy and the "Our Father" with the entire Church that we are able to transform this "house" into the house that Jesus lives in. These children have been entrusted to us in order to make them into strong Christians. Judgment will be upon us if we don't do all we can to live in harmony and practice Christian love with one another. How great the sin, if we are responsible for turning off one child to the Church. We must do all that is possible so that when they grow up and become adults they may say YES to their Orthodoxy that has been ingrained in them from childhood. It is with these souls in mind that we as their guardians must act and establish a permanent home for Jesus that our children can grow spiritually and become even greater witnesses then us who have come before them.

Are we ready to build a Church? If we were a small business and were facing this dilemma we might conclude no. If we were a small business, we might seek a solution in raising funds by building a Community Center first and then some day eventually build a Church. We are not a small business. We are the people of God who make our decisions not based upon human logic but based upon our faith in God that He will provide all we need.

At no time in the history of the Orthodox Church has entering into "business" ever been resorted to in order to provide for its ministries. No where do we find the apostles having a "Garage Sale" every-time something came up. Greek Food Festivals can become financial crutches which take the responsibility away from the people of God to provide for the Church and place it in the hands of outsiders who have no interest in our Orthodox faith, culture or ethics. Ministries were always provided for by direct giving

from those who had committed themselves totally to Christ. We ought to be inspired by the fact that we operated in 1996 without a Greek Food Festival and without a multitude of gimmicks! It came to pass because we didn't just give a token donation this year - we made sacrifices that were very difficult in many cases to fulfill.

Our souls need to be nourished with the "Living Waters" of the Holy Spirit. If we are not drinking of these waters our souls become darkened, negative, judgmental, critical and divisive. St. Basil the Great, when he referred to the Church he called it a hospital for souls. Our souls need to be nourished with the "Living Waters" of the Holy Spirit. If we are not drinking of these waters our souls become darkened, negative, judgmental, critical and divisive. Our souls are healed by worshipping in the presence of the living God, partaking of the Body and Blood of Christ and loving One another as Christ has loved us with His unconditional love. The highest priority for any Christian community must be to encounter Christ in the Holy Chalice - this is why we must place our faith in God and build His Church first.

Seek His Kingdom and His righteousness and all these things will be added unto you.

In Christ's Love,

+ Fr. Andrew