

Time, Talent and Treasure

BY REV. MATTHEW BROWN

IF EACH CHRISTIAN IS CALLED to be a Steward of the good things God has given him, then one of the first questions which should be asked is: “What are those good things?” In each of our lives there are numerous things which we can count as blessings.

Have you ever worked at a retail store? If so, you have probably had to “do inventory” at least once or twice. Each of us needs to do an “inventory” of our own life and consider the things with which God has entrusted us. Consider taking your inventory using these three categories: Time, Talent, and Treasure.

Time is truly a gift. Any person who has had a near-death experience or who is a survivor of cancer knows what it is like to have the time you thought was snatched from you miraculously returned. Usually these experiences provide clarity to the person as to how they will now spend this time which has been given them. Is it necessary for each of us to have such a fearsome experience in order to have our own moment of clarity? More important than the extra days, months or years, is the realization of how precious the time we have is. What are you doing with your time?

If you were to look at how you spent this past week, what would you find? Would what you actually do match what you say your priorities are? Would you find that you don’t spend as much time with your family as you thought? Or would you find that you do not attend church as often as you ought to – or as often as God would want you to? Such an examination would likely challenge us to set our priorities straight, making sure God, His Church, our family and friends, and the other loves in our lives are at the top.

What are the “good things” which God has entrusted to us?

We should also challenge ourselves by asking, “How am I using the talents given to me by God?” We all have a certain number of talents given to us, and we are entrusted by the Lord to use them for the benefit of our family, our community, God, His Church, and His people. What are the abilities, expertise, social connections, and influence God has given me? Do I spend them

on selfish interests, or do I utilize them for the benefit of others?

Finally, we should examine the use of our treasure. We all possess a certain amount of wealth, whether through hard work or inheritance. But the truth is that even if it seems like we have earned all of our wealth ourselves, we have not. In fact, there is no success any of us has ever achieved *solely* on our own. We are always standing on the shoulders of others. Someone else always has a part to play in our success, even if it is small... and God is always at the source of every success, giving us His blessing.

Examining our use of Time, Talent, and Treasure is about being intentional and thoughtful about our Christian life. If we are haphazard or casual in our approach to stewardship, or if we fail to think in these terms at all, then we are very likely to fall short as Christians. And our our willingness, or reluctance, to take this spiritual “inventory” does not just affect us; it impacts those we love most: God, His Church, and our family. Stewardship is ultimately about love and loving intentionally.

How we give in American Orthodox parishes

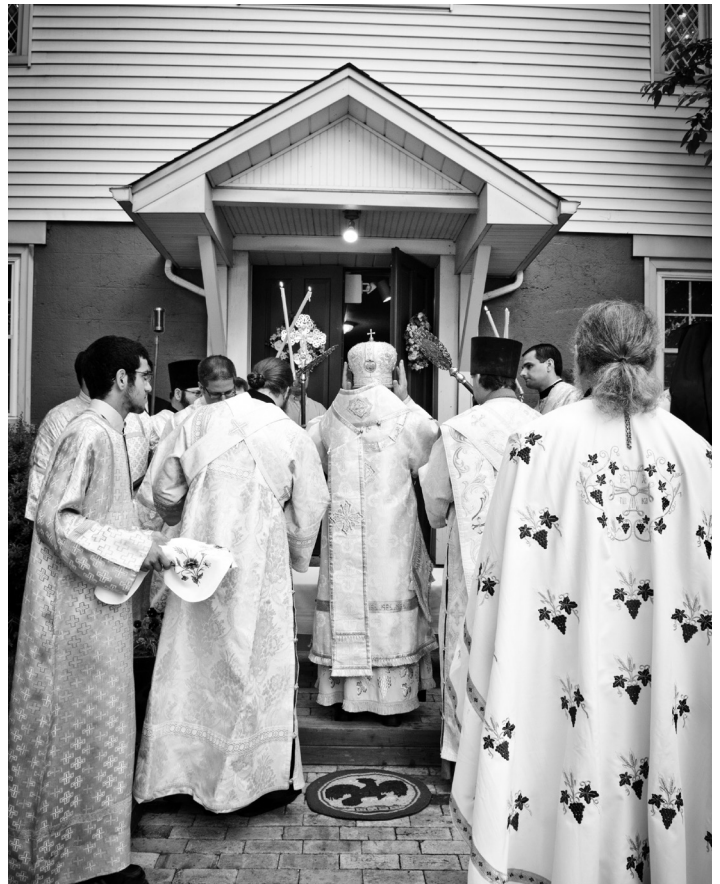
In the Orthodox Church in America, an average household gave about \$3,000 to a parish in regular contributions in 2014.

When donations to a parish are measured as a percentage of income, higher-income households are less generous than lower-income households. A typical (median) Orthodox household earning between \$30,000 and \$49,999 gives 3.75% of its income to the parish, whereas households in the \$90,000 - \$109,999 income category give 2.5%.

Converts to Orthodoxy give almost twice as much annually to their churches as "cradle" Orthodox when measured in actual dollar amounts, and they give more than twice as much when donations are measured as a percentage of a household's income (4.9% versus 2.2%).

When it comes to the major personal motives to give to the Church, 60% of parishioners give to the Church because this is part of their religious convictions and they believe that "it is what God expects of us." The remaining 40% of church members contribute to their parish communities mainly because of pragmatic reasons – to pay bills and to take care of the needs of their parish communities.

Taken from "**Highlights of Findings from the Study 'Exploring Orthodox Generosity: Giving in US Orthodox Parishes'**" released by the Assembly of Bishops (<http://bit.ly/1MMpOVp>).



STEWARDSHIP IN THE SAINTS

SAINT JOHN THE MERCIFUL was born on Cyprus in the seventh century. When the patriarchal throne of Alexandria fell vacant, the emperor Heraclius and all the clergy begged St John to occupy the Patriarchal throne. The saint worthily assumed his archpastoral service, concerning himself with the moral and dogmatic welfare of his flock.

He considered his chief task to be charitable and to help all those in need. At the beginning of his patriarchal service he ordered his stewards to compile a list of all the poor and downtrodden in Alexandria. The saint ordered that they be provided for each day out of the church's treasury. On Wednesdays and Fridays, sitting on the cathedral's church portico, he received everyone in need. He settled quarrels, helped the wronged, and distributed alms. It was during this period that the emperor Heraclius led a tremendous army against the Persians. The Persians ravaged and burned Jerusalem, taking a multitude of captives. St John paid for their ransom.

The saint never refused beggars. One day he met a beggar and commanded that he be given six silver coins. The beggar changed his clothes, ran on ahead, and again asked for alms. St John gave him six more silver coins. When the beggar tried a third time and the servants began to chase him away, St John ordered that he be given twelve silver coins, saying, "Perhaps he is Christ putting me to the test." Twice the saint gave money to a merchant that had suffered shipwreck, and a third time gave him a ship filled with grain, with which the merchant had a successful journey and repaid his obligations.

SCRIPTURE AND STEWARDSHIP

1 Timothy As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life. (6:17-19)

1 Corinthians We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints — and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us. (8:1-5)

Mission Statement

First Fruits is written to encourage everyone in our Diocese to be good stewards of all that God has given them. Please feel free to send comments and suggestions for future articles to Archpriest Gary Breton at gjbretton@gmail.com.