



Saint Philip Orthodox Christian Church

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Forty Days of Growth in Stewardship 2017

"Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong."

1 Corinthians 16:13

October 16, 2016
Holy Fathers of the 7th Ecumenical Council

Beloved in Christ,

Glory to Jesus Christ!

As we approach the question of our stewardship here at St. Philip's this year, we are invited to do so through the Apostle's admonition to the church in Corinth: "Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong" (1 Cor 16:13).

St. Paul reminds us here of several important realities involved in the Christian life. First of all, we are reminded that the Christian life is one of struggle, indeed of combat. Our mission is to be God's reconciling agents in the world, bringing the lost territory of God's good creation, of our souls and the souls of our neighbors, out of the dominion of darkness and back into the light of God's kingdom.

In the long and venerable history of our Orthodox faith, this combat has cost many their lives, given in martyrdom, bearing witness to Christ and his Gospel. For us, this combat takes a somewhat different form perhaps, in the daily struggle to orient all aspects of our lives to what is eternal, to what is good and virtuous and noble, to subdue the passions that distract and divert our hearts from loving God, each other, and our neighbors truly and fully.

Our stewardship of God's gifts—of our time, talents, and material resources—as a church is a central battle in this war. How do we demonstrate our commitment to and confession of what is eternal in the choices we make with these gifts?

The second reality we are reminded of, which is already implied, is that we are not to be like "everybody else." This would hardly need to be said, it seems, for us as Orthodox Christians living in America, but it is good to be reminded that authentic Christian living will put us at odds in many ways with the world around us. Our orientation toward what is eternal will make us feel like we are standing in a fast-moving stream, struggling to keep our foothold. We should not be content, then, with simply cultural trappings, for example, that set us apart from the dominant society in which we live. Our mandate is much more substantive than this. It is to live and move and breathe in God's Spirit, and thus to have our hearts transformed and overflow with joy, peace, gratitude, and generosity.

In the third place, we should observe the Apostle's confidence in the Corinthians' ability to follow his apostolic exhortation. Likewise, we too must have confidence that God will not ask us to do something for which we are unable. After all, the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead is also at work in us.

And lastly, we see in St. Paul's words that we are called to a life of watchfulness—we are all called to be a "Gregory," whose name means "watchful, vigilant." Now certainly this involves a defensive vigilance, guarding against the vices and craftiness of the world and the devil. But it equally involves an openness to being used by God, a watchfulness that seeks to meet needs as they emerge, that seeks to encourage and build up our brothers and sisters, and to bear witness to the faith of Holy Orthodoxy.

This year, and in these forty days, let us reflect on how we at St. Philip's might more fully encourage one another and build each other up through the gifts and resources we have been entrusted, as indeed we are already doing (cf. 1Thess 5:11).

May God bless your generosity in the coming year!

Yours sincerely in Christ,

The St. Philip's Stewardship Team

"And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch." Acts 11:26