

Rector's Letter for November, 2011

Dear brothers and sisters:

We are made to be a thanksgiving people. God created all things and called them good, and He crowned His creation with human beings, who are able to return an offering of thanks “on behalf of all and for all,” as we say every Divine Liturgy. We can give thanks for the sunshine and the stars of heaven. And we can give thanks for each other. This is the great work which angels cannot fulfill, but in which small children take part. We can share in that Great Thanksgiving every Divine Liturgy: “Let us give thanks to the Lord!” “It is meet and right” “Remembering all these things which have come to pass for us, the Cross, the Tomb, the Resurrection on the third day ... Your own of Your own we offer to You, on behalf of all and for all — We praise You, we bless you, *we give thanks to You*, and we pray to You, O our God!”

When we make giving thanks our way of life, it changes us and the world around us. It gives new meaning to everything that happens and everything we do. For those who fail to give thanks, existence is a torment, full of all the moments we didn't get our due, the struggles to get even, the grinding fight to grab enough to keep going. Being ungrateful is a failure to be truly human, wasting our lives and spreading darkness and misery.

Giving thanks does not mean that suddenly bad things pass us by, but it does mean that we are not slaves to good fortune. We find joy in the gift of life itself, even in the midst of suffering, and we trust that God who has given us every good thing also has a purpose to bring good even out of evil circumstances.

Remember the story of Joseph, who was sold into slavery by his brothers and so was brought into a position to save both Egypt and his whole family from years of famine. In the end, he told his brothers: “Do not be afraid ... you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good ... to save many people alive. Now therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones” (Genesis 50.19-21). This trust in the goodness of God is at the heart of giving thanks.

Trust and giving thanks is the key to understanding the Scriptures as well. Our Lord, having risen from the dead, appeared to two of His disciples on the road to Emmaus and opened the Scriptures to them, showing how Moses and all the prophets taught that Christ would suffer and die and so “enter into His glory” (Luke 24.13-35). So it is “meet and right” for us to give thanks that God prepared our salvation from the very beginning, and that He has prepared for each one of us a place at the great Wedding Banquet. We can recognize that all the complicated threads of our lives are in the hands of the Master Craftsman who does not make junk.

We can give thanks for the story of our fathers and mothers, who brought us into the

world and who provided for us; and we can continue to give thanks for the story of our parish over the past one hundred years. Our church family can give thanks for all those who give of themselves to serve the church: the founders and benefactors; all the pastors over the years; those who have served on the parish council, around the altar, in the church school, in the choir; those who have worked inside and out to beautify our church; those who have provided hospitality; and the multitudes who have celebrated with us. All of these are blessings from God.

So let us take joy in Thanksgiving Day. It is the most sacred of civic holidays. Let us embrace it as part of our Christian ministry, inspiring us to give thanks to God every day. We can follow the teaching of the Apostle Paul:

Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, **with thanksgiving**, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

(Philippians 4:4-8)

Yours in Christ,

Fr. Joshua S. Modlin

Around the Parish

For all the hard work in preparation for our **parish centennial celebration, Oct 8-9**, thank you! The Anniversary Committee did a tremendous job of planning and coordination. The choir and altar servers performed their responsibilities with grace. The church was beautiful, and all our guests felt welcomed by our parish's efforts. God bless you!

The **All-American Council of the Orthodox Church in America** will be held in the vicinity of Seattle, Washington, Oct. 31-Nov. 4. Every few years, delegates of the various parishes, monasteries, and seminaries of the OCA meet with the Holy Synod of Bishops to deliberate on the overall direction and mission of our Church. Fr. Joshua and Tim Tassmer will represent our parish. Please pray for us all.

On Sunday, Nov. 6, we will observe the annual **Endowment Fund thanksgiving and memorial service** after the Divine Liturgy. We will give thanks for all the blessings the Lord has showered on us, and commemorate the living and departed remembered through the Fund.

Please submit your pledge form for 2012 as soon as possible, to allow the parish to complete budget planning. Your prayerful and generous

support is what will allow our church to live and grow and expand its mission of spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ for another hundred years.

The Brotherhood is holding a **Coat Collection Drive** again this autumn. Please donate coats, hats, and gloves in good condition downstairs. Children's items are especially needed. As winter begins, we will offer them to any in our neighborhood who need them. We had a wonderful response last year, and we hope to do even better this time around.

We are collecting donations for Thanksgiving to distribute to ten families in need in our parish neighborhood on Sunday, Nov. 20. We are asking for contributions of money so that we can purchase Thanksgiving dinner fixings and pantry necessities for neighbors that would otherwise have a meager celebration. (If you would prefer to donate in kind, please leave non-perishable food for ten families downstairs in the church.) As we look forward to our own festive Thanksgiving celebrations with our families, please give generously.

We are also planning a **Thanksgiving dinner for the parish on Sunday, Nov. 13**. Besides feasting before the Nativity Fast begins (Nov. 15), we will deliver an encore presentation of our parish anniversary video. We need volunteers to prepare dishes for the dinner— please speak with

our coordinators Donna Leonowich and John Stoidis.

The **Nativity Fast** begins on Tuesday, Nov. 15. This season prepares us for the Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ. As the shop displays and catalogs are already warning us, Christmas is approaching fast. For the world around us, this means a frenzy of shopping, decorating, and partying. If we would truly enter into the blessings God has set before us, we need to begin a very different sort of labor: being mindful of God for the gift of his Son and acting out of gratitude in every aspect of life. We observe the Nativity Fast by refraining from meat and rich foods, by prayer and giving to the needy. May we be blessed with peace!

We will observe **Thanksgiving Day** with the Akathist Service, "Glory to God for all things," on Thurs., Nov. 24, at 10:00 AM. This simple yet profound service is not long, but it does give thanks for every aspect of creation. Consider making it part of your own Thanksgiving.

The **Holy Synod of Bishops has blessed us to observe Thanksgiving Day as a feast**, since it is always good to thank the Lord for his bounties. We have been granted the day as a rest from the Fast, but once we have consumed the leftovers, it is time to renew our spiritual efforts as we get ready to celebrate the greatest gift of all: the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We will be starting a **Bible Study on a series of Old Testament stories** during the Advent season — to help us better appreciate the Coming of our savior Jesus Christ. We will be starting in mid-November, with a time yet to be determined. If you would like to make a suggestion for timing, please speak with Fr. Joshua in the next week or two.

Opportunities around Connecticut

At 7 PM on Tues., Nov. 8, Christ the Savior Church, Southbury, invites us to celebrate the **Feast of St. Nectarios**. St. Nectarios is the patron of the Southbury church and of those suffering with cancer. At the conclusion of the service, there will be a prayer for the sick, and anointing with oil from St. Nectarios' grave. Please see the bulletin board for details.

Christ the Savior Church, Southbury, also invites us to participate in their annual **Connecticut Bible Lecture Series** on Saturday, Nov. 19. Fr. Paul Nadim Tarazi, Professor of Old Testament studies at St. Vladimir's Seminary, will be speaking on the books of Kings, Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah. Registration is free, but please contact Fr. Vladimir Aleandro (203-267-1330) or Dn. John Zarras (johnzarras@earthlink.net). Please see the flyer posted on the bulletin board for more details.

Entry of the Most-Holy Theotokos into the Temple

On Nov. 20, we celebrate this feast of the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary. The righteous Joachim and Anna had waited long, sorrowful years to be granted a child, and when the Lord at last gave them Mary in their old age, they vowed that when she was weaned, she would be offered to the Lord's service in the Temple in Jerusalem. In the feast of the Entry into the Temple, we celebrate how this vow was fulfilled with thanksgiving and joy. Through their offering, the child Mary was raised up to become a temple and dwelling-place for God the Word—Jesus Christ our Lord.

Troparion - Tone 4

Today Anna bequeaths joy to all instead of sorrow
by bringing forth her fruit, the only ever-Virgin.
In fulfillment of her vow,
today with joy she brings to the temple of the Lord
the true temple and pure Mother of God the Word.

Kontakion - Tone 4

Today the universe is filled with joy
at the glorious feast of the Mother of God,
and cries out: "She is the heavenly heavenly tabernacle."