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Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America: Metropolitan Joseph's message for choir and chanters Appreciation Sunday 2020



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Choir and Chanters Appreciation Sunday
The Feast of St. Nicholas the Wonderworker
December 6, 2020

Beloved in Christ,

We greet you on this holy feast of St. Nicholas the Wonderworker, Archbishop of Myra in Lycia, as we honor our choir members and chanters.

This beloved saint, who is revered throughout the world, inspires the essence of what this holy season embodies, giving to the poor and serving as a model of humility and abstinence. St. Nicholas was not one of those great and learned theologians who left us volumes to read. Rather, he was one who through meekness and sacrificial love led by example. He defended the faith against Arianism, one of the ancient heresies that plagued the early Church. The words

from his apolytikion (troparion), “by humility you received exaltation and by your meekness wealth” serve as a reminder of his way of life and as an example for all of us to emulate. That very apolytikion became a model hymn for all hierarchs. The great love and devotion of the faithful for St. Nicholas is expressed by the many churches dedicated to his patronage throughout the world. Within the Archdiocese, we first established the mother cathedral in Brooklyn, NY, and then soon after the cathedral in Los Angeles, CA, with a number of parishes dedicated to him in between. May he continue to intercede for us!

As Orthodox Christians, we are called upon to defend the truth of our faith at every possible opportunity. While our calling to do so today is unlike that of St. Nicholas many centuries ago, we all the same find occasions to do so in a variety of ways, one of which is through church hymnography. Sacred music is a means by which we can communicate Orthodox theology thereby helping the faithful to understand complicated dogma in palatable way.

It is with this in mind that we set aside the first Sunday of December every year to say “thank you” to our choirs and chanters. Together with our clergy, Sunday School teachers, youth workers and others, our choir members and chanters teach us the faith through chanting the ancient hymns of our Church via various musical traditions that we have inherited from all over the world.

This year in particular, we are especially grateful to our choir members and chanters for their perseverance and faithfulness in the midst of the pandemic that has hovered over us since March. These months have indeed been unlike any others we have ever experienced. Instead of large beautiful choirs, we have been limited to a small handful of singers; and even just one or two people responding to the priest in the early months of the pandemic. As the summer came and things improved, we were able to return in some way or another to a limited sense of normalcy with regard to our choirs, depending on the local circumstances. Now, it seems once again, we may be called to endure more as cases increase-may God give us strength!

Nevertheless, God, in his mercy and infinite wisdom, has provided ways and means for us to not only get by, but has even inspired us with new ideas to teach our choirs during this time. Thanks be to God, through the direction of our capable chairlady of the Department of Sacred Music, Ms. Mareena Boosamra Ball, we have found ways to keep everyone involved and reach even more people. We had a very successful Sacred Music Institute last summer on “Zoom” that had a record of 357 registrants. Because of that great success they have continued offering weekly

“Zoom” classes in Western Music Theory, Byzantine Chant and Voice Lessons taught by the department faculty. The department is also planning a virtual archdiocesan-wide Christmas concert this month on December 22nd at 8:00 PM on YouTube and many parishes are following their lead by doing similar things on the local level. May God continue to guide them as they navigate through these troubling times and encourage them to continue to inspire all of us! So once again let us say “thank you” and, more importantly let us pray for our choir members and chanters, especially those who have not been able to “sing to the Lord” during this time, with the fervent prayer that their collective voices may once again lift up our prayers to the heavens and fill our churches with songs of praise.

With paternal love and appreciation,

+JOSEPH

Archbishop of New York and Metropolitan of all North America

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