

A Good Word—Λόγον Αγαθόν Monthly Newsletter of the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Pittsburgh



Metropolitan's Message:

Over the course of my long life in the Orthodox Church, I've heard my fair share of sermons. Not all, I confess, were memorable, but some were impossible to forget. Among the unforgettable was one I heard delivered nearly half a century ago, in my home parish of Sts. Constantine and Helen, which was transitioning at the time from its original site in Gary, Indiana, to its current location in Merrillville. The priest who delivered it was Fr. Evagoras Constantinides of blessed memory, and it was about stewardship. So strong was its impact on me that, to this day, whenever I hear a stewardship appeal, I measure it against that sermon of Fr. Ev's.

Fr. Ev had only been our proistamenos for a few years by that time but he certainly knew his parishioners well. He knew who worked at what steel mill, what their job was, and he had a good idea about what their hourly wages were. He challenged his people to give, in an approximation of his words, "not ten percent, as the people of Israel were directed to do by God in Old Testament times. I'm not even asking for five percent. I'm asking for your first hour's pay. Not the change you put in the jar when you come home. The first hour of the week. Monday morning, whenever you punch in. Make the sign of the Cross, ask God to bless your work, and promise him the next hour's pay. From the top. Not the leftovers. God didn't want diseased animals or rotten vegetables. He wanted the best, the first-fruits. When you give him from the top, you demonstrate your love for God. You demonstrate your faith. You consecrate your day. You make holy the time. That's one hour out of forty. Not

ten percent, not five percent, but two percent! And I know what you make, Costa. I know what you make, Manoli.” (Here, he actually pointed!) “Your first hour’s pay! Give it to God. Tell yourself clearly: it’s not yours, it’s his. Put it aside that day, put it in an envelope, bring it to church on Sunday.”

To tell the truth, I don’t know how effective that sermon was at the time. The habit of paying dues – so much for an individual, so much for families – was still deeply ingrained in the parishioners’ consciences. But I believe I wasn’t the only one who took Fr. Ev’s words to heart, and that, over time, people began to dare to do it (and even to exceed it).

There’s something powerful about beginning or renewing something. We make an extra effort at the beginning of a year, a season, a month, a week, a day. We are at another beginning in our lives as Orthodox Christians with the coming of Great Lent, which provides us with a convenient point to more deeply engage in the practice of our faith: prayer, stewardship & almsgiving, fasting, and a stronger commitment to spiritually supporting family and friends. If we’re starting from zero in these areas, we can begin as Fr. Ev encouraged the community—not at the pinnacle or the hardest level, but a modest start, deliberate and dedicated to God. And if we are accustomed to that kind of commitment, then we can instead seek to push our progress to a higher level. May Christ strengthen and enlighten you in this coming Lenten season, and may your efforts—the “first hour” that you offer—be multiplied for God’s glory and your salvation.

+ Metropolitan Savas

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