

Next Services

**Saturday
October 14th**

Great Vespers at 5:00 pm

**Sunday
October 15th**

Divine Liturgy at 10:00 am

both at

**St. Olympia Chapel
123 Main Street
Potsdam, NY**

All welcome!

Sayings of the Desert Fathers

Macarius (Makarios) the Great of Egypt was born c. 300 AD. He was a former camel driver who traded in nitre. He was ordained a priest and lived as an anchorite in a village until he was accused and cleared of a crime (see below). He was greatly influenced by St. Anthony the Great and visited him at least twice. He died in 390 AD.

Abba Macarius said this about himself: "When I was young and was living in a cell in Egypt, they took me to make me a cleric in the village. Because I did not wish to receive this dignity, I fled to another place. Then a devout layman joined me; he sold my manual work for me and served me. Now it happened that a virgin in the village, under the weight of temptation, committed sin. When she became pregnant, they asked her who was to blame. She said, 'The anchorite.' Then they came to seize me, led me to the village and hung pots black with soot and various other things round my neck and led me through the village in all directions, beating me and saying, 'This monk has defiled our virgin, catch him, catch him,' and they beat me almost to death. Then one of the old men came and said, 'What are you doing, how long will you go on beating this strange monk,?' The man who served me was walking behind me, full of shame, for they covered him with insults, too, saying, 'Look at this anchorite, for whom you stood surety; what has he done?' The girl's parents said, 'Do not let him go until he has given a pledge that he will keep her.' I spoke to my servant and he vouched for me. Going to my cell, I gave him all the baskets I had, saying, 'Sell them, and give my wife something to eat.' Then I said to myself, 'Macarius, you have found yourself a wife; you must work a little more in order to support her.' So I worked night and day, and sent my work to her. But when the time came for the girl to give birth, she remained in labor many days without bring forth, and they said to her, 'What is the matter?' She said, 'I know what it is, it is because I slandered the anchorite, and accused him unjustly; it is not he who is to blame, but such and such a young man.' Then the man who served me came to me full of joy saying, 'The girl could not give birth until she had said, 'The anchorite had nothing to do with it, but I have lied about him.'" The whole village wants to come here solemnly and do penance before you.' But when I heard this, for fear people would disturb me, I got up and fled here to Scetis. That is the original reason why I came here."

One day Abba Macarius went from Scetis to the mountain of Nitria from the offering of Abba Pambo. The old men said to him, "Father, way a word to the brethren." He said, "I have not yet become a monk myself, but I have seen monks. One day when I was sitting in my cell my thoughts were troubling me, suggesting that I should go to the desert and see what I could see there. I remained for five years, fighting against this thought, saying, perhaps it comes from the demons. But since the thought persisted, I left for the desert. There I found a sheet of water and an island in the midst, and the animals of the desert came to drink there. In the midst of these animals I saw two naked men, and my body trembled, for I believed they were spirits. Seeing me shaking, they said to me, 'Do not be afraid, for we are men.' Then I said to them, 'Where do you come from, and how did you come to this desert?' They said, 'We come from a monastery and having agreed together, we came here forty years ago. One of us is an Egyptian and the other a Libyan.' They questioned me and asked me, 'How is the world? Is the water rising in due time? Is the world enjoying prosperity?' I replied it was, then I asked them, 'How can I become a monk?' They said to me, 'If you do not give up all that is in the world, you cannot become a monk.' I said to them, 'But I am weak, and I cannot do as you do.' So they said to me, 'If you cannot become like us, sit in your cell and weep for your sins.' I asked them, 'When the winter comes are you not frozen? And when the heat comes do not your bodies burn?' They said, 'It is God who has made this way of life for us. We do not freeze in winter, and the summer does us no harm.' That is why I said that I have not yet become a monk, but I have seen monks."



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Welcome to St. Olympia Orthodox Church, a young and, God willing, growing community of worshippers.

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Abundance

Note: the following article has been written by an anonymous contributor. It is included here by permission.

18th Sunday after Pentecost Epistle (2 Cor.9:6-11)

Last Sunday's Epistle, 2 Corinthians 9:6-11, talks about financial giving. Verse 7 urges, "So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or out of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver." Uh-oh; another sermon about stewardship and tithing. Ugh! Not really. You see, we cannot understand this text until we understand its context. And if we go back to the beginning of chapter 8 and the beginning of chapter 9, we discover that Paul's not talking about giving to budgets and buildings and salaries and/or parish programs. Rather, he's addressing our need to break out of our tunnel-vision; to stop seeing ourselves and our congregation in isolation from the rest of the Body of Christ; and to start caring for people, and especially our brothers and sisters in Christ, wherever they are and whatever their need.

The situation was that the believers in Jerusalem and Judea, mostly of Jewish background, were being hit hard by famine. People weren't just hungry; men, women, seniors, children, infants were dying of starvation. Other parts of the Roman world had food; but they weren't about to give it away. So those in Judea had to pay inflated prices for the food and inflated prices for the shipping and transport; money ran out quickly; and with no food to give energy to work, there was no way to earn more money. It was a vicious circle. What to do? Paul didn't get discouraged; he got energized to organize a collection from all the believers in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey) to send to the believers in Jerusalem and Judea. I'm willing to bet that the idea gave Paul the giggles. Remember: the believers in Asia Minor were overwhelmingly Gentile; and the Jewish believers had resisted admitting Gentiles to the Church. But now it was the Gentiles who, out of love for Christ, were going to save their lives.

In any case, Paul was busy organizing the collection and he was not at all hesitant to nag, flatter, play on regional rivalries and/or guilt-trip the faithful in Asia Minor into being generous. In chapter 9, verses 1-4, he writes, "Now concerning the ministering to the saints [the collection for Judea], it is superfluous for me to write to you; for I know your willingness, about which I boast of you to the Macedonians, that Achaia [where Corinth was] was ready a year ago; and your zeal has stirred up the majority. Yet I have sent the brethren, lest our boasting of you should be in vain in this respect, that, as I said, you may be ready; lest if some Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we (not to mention you!) should be ashamed of this confident boasting." It'd be like him saying to us, "Now if a bunch of Los Angelans come with me, I don't want you New Yorkers looking like cheap skin-flints." Paul's pulling out all the stops to get his spiritual children to do the right thing.

But in the process, Paul teaches us some truths about giving and about our relationship with money and material things. In verse 6, he writes, "But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully;" a stingy planter gets a stingy crop, while a lavish planter gets a lavish crop. And that's not new or unique to Christianity. Don't we say, "You gotta spend money to make money" and "There's no such thing as a free lunch"? In the stock market, if a person invests only a little bit, they can reasonably expect only a small amount in return. And this truth applies to any resource, time and talents, as well as treasure. In Luke 6:38 the Lord Jesus tells us, "Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you."

The big question, however, is "In what are we investing our time, talent, and treasure?" Some of these TV preachers use this text to try to create some sort of magic formula: "You give to my ministry, and God will make you prosper financially." But think now: what was the benefit, the return on their financial generosity that Paul was promising the Corinthians? Was he promising them fat bank accounts, a brand-new Lexus chariot? Nope. The reward, says verse 11, is that they would be "enriched in everything for all liberality [generosity] which causes thanksgiving through us to God." The pay-off for their investing in loving their neighbor by helping their neighbor would be God prospering them even more financially so that they would be able to give more to other people in need more generously, resulting in somebody remembering them before God with thanksgiving.

Does that strike us as a bad deal, like we're getting the short end of the stick? If so, it's a sign that we still think that we live "by bread alone," that having a pile of money in the bank is more important than God's grace and providential care. It means we're still not listening to the Lord Jesus in Matthew 6:19-21, where He specifically tells us, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust [and, we could add, inflation] destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

And yeah, I know: in Proverbs 6:6-11 we're told "Go to the ant, you sluggard [lazy-bones]! Consider her ways and be wise" by imitating the ant in working hard and making prudent provision for the future. Indeed, in 2 Thessalonians 3:10 St. Paul lays down the principle governing our giving that "If anyone will not work [not 'cannot work' but 'will not work'], neither shall he eat." But the point of working hard is not to keep it all for myself, either by building up my bank account or indulging my every whim with all the latest technological play-toys. Notice how, in verse 8 of last Sunday's Epistle, the Apostle carefully explains that "God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things [everything you really need], may have an abundance [enough left over] for every good work." Sometimes we wonder why God allows so much poverty and sickness in our world. But it never seems to occur to us that *you*, that *I*, that we are God's provision for relieving that poverty and sickness; that God prospers us precisely so that we may help those folks in need. A strange blindness, that.

Now note verse 7, where the Apostle says, "So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver." And the point is that when it comes to giving and helping, we should to take our time to think it over, and make up our own mind as to what is the highest and best we can give. Why? Simple: loving others, or just being a kind person, tend to render us vulnerable to sob stories and arm-twisting. So "purposing in our heart," thinking it through, can protect us from being manipulated. God loves it when the giver delights in the giving, rather than giving and then regretting and/or resenting it.

But "purposing in our heart" also demands that we think through our basic relationship with God. Do I really trust God to "make all grace abound to me, that I, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work"? Do I trust that if I'm generous in giving and helping, God will see to it that I have enough to meet my own needs? Do I trust that if I love my neighbor by sharing what I have, my Father in heaven will make sure I get my daily bread? Giving, you see, is less about my finances than my faith. "Purposing in our heart" also has to do with planning out our giving and helping. We can be really good about giving to the needy at Christmas-time, but not take into account that those needs remain after Christmas. So if I've got only so much to give, I need to plan it out so that I can help consistently, because the need will certainly remain constant.

And just what's in it for me? How about abundant living from the Lord? Again in verse 8, Paul insists that "God is able to make all grace abound toward [us]." In John 10:10 the Lord Jesus tells us, "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly; I came so they might have real life, eternal life, more and better life than they ever dreamed possible." God wants us to have abundance. The problem is that we think that abundance and prosperity mean having lots of money. But what about love, or grace, or family, or peace, or joy? The abundance God promises is not "by bread alone," because that ends when our life here ends. The abundance God promises is an abundance of grace, of His love in action in our lives, starting now and continuing into and throughout eternity. And on the investment of money we'd lose anyway to inflation, government and death, that abundance of God's all-sufficient grace is a huge return!