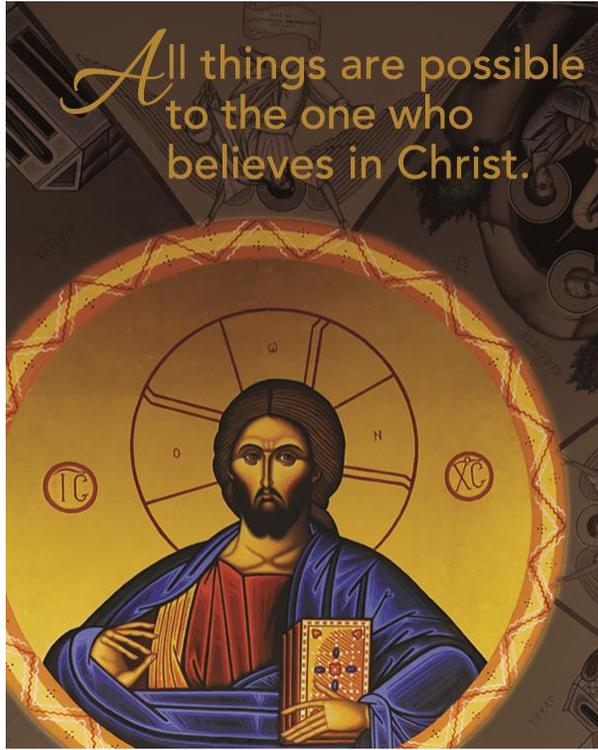


## STEWARDS OF THE FAITH



Having faith can be difficult. Keeping faith in the face of doubt is the ongoing struggle of every Christian since the earliest days of Christianity. We dedicate the first Sunday after Easter to Thomas the Apostle, forever remembered as “Doubting Thomas” because he doubted the first reports of the Resurrected Christ.

In the Gospel of Mark (9:22 NKJV), we read that when the disciples can't help him, a father brings his epileptic son to Jesus in desperation, saying, “...if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.” Jesus replies to the

father's lack of faith, “If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes.” The father's response is a prayer we can pray every day: “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!”

Faith is our trust in God. Faith is our trust that He watches over us and has a plan for us: “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope” (Jeremiah 29:11 NKJV). Living with the uncertainty of daily life requires faith. Uncertainty also invites doubt. But doubt does not indicate a lack of faith. As theologian and philosopher Paul Tillich has written, “Doubt is not the opposite of faith; it is one element of faith.” Doubt is a part of our journey of faith. We need to face our doubt honestly and directly.

Faith is often accompanied by struggle with doubt. Doubt instills humility. Doubt motivates us to learn and to grow. In spite of his doubt, the Apostle Thomas remained open to the truth of the Resurrection. When he saw the Risen Christ, he immediately believed and became a great apostle of the faith. His doubt led him to a greater faith.

Stewardship of our faith in Jesus Christ calls us to do those things that protect and strengthen the faith that lies within us. Taking time to learn about our Orthodox Christian Faith, praying to

God for understanding and guidance, and worshiping with others as the Body

of Christ – all these things protect and strengthen our faith. As stewards of the faith, Saint Peter instructs us to “...always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you...” (1 Peter 3:15 NKJV).

Faith is not a big rule book of “dos and don'ts.” It is about loving and seeing Jesus Christ in others. Stewardship of our faith in Jesus Christ calls us to do those things that reflect our faith to others, living our faith through our actions. Jesus tells us, “By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35 NKJV). There is no better way to share the faith that lies within us than to see Jesus Christ in others and to love and care for them.

Through faith, God's will is accomplished in the world. Our great example is Mary, the Theotokos, the Mother of our Lord. When Archangel Gabriel came to her at the Annunciation, tradition and hymnology hold that all creation awaited her response. In faith and obedience to the will of God, Mary replied to the angel, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be according to your word” (Luke 1:38 NKJV). Mary responds with faith and fulfills God's will for all the world.

Research has shown that as Christians we seek three things from our church: Transcendence, Significance and Fellowship (*Lost in America*, Clegg &

Bird 2001).

Transcendence is to know God and to experience His presence. This we do through prayerful participation in Liturgy and the sacraments. Significance is the desire to have a purpose—to do something meaningful—most often in service to our fellow man. Fellowship is connecting with others through meaningful relationships. The Church offers opportunities for Transcendence, Significance and Fellowship, and in their pursuit, we also serve and support the Church and fully become members of the Body of Christ. To be stewards of the faith we are also called to be stewards of our local church which nurtures our faith and the faith of others. Stewardship is an act of faith.

When we believe, stewardship follows. Stewardship is faith in action; action motivated by humble gratitude to God for his blessings in our life.

As Saint John tells us about all that is written in his Gospel, “...these things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:31 NKJV).

“Stewardship is the offering to God as children of faith rather than as hired servants. Children of God make offerings to God as expression of authentic love, whereas, hired servants simply fulfill legalistic duty. Christian stewardship is a manifestation of our love for God through the holistic offering of time, talent, and treasure to Him, through Christ’s Holy Church. By this offering of love to our Father in heaven, He further extends the healing experience of His Church to His children, through Her ministry.”

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