

TITHING

The Church is the Body of Christ, and just as Christ united in Himself human and heavenly nature, in the Church the heavenly is united with the earthly. The Church is not only comprised of apostles, saints, and holy monks, but also of us— exactly in as much as we submit our earthly selves to the heavenly — “I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (Galatians 2:20); in as much as we live in Christ. As the Lord builds His Heavenly Church through the saints, He builds the Earthly Church through us.

In the Old Testament times, God gave His people commandments by which they could live righteous lives that were pleasing to God. One of the commandments was a law about tithing. Having received earthly blessings, the people of God gave the first and best—a tenth of all they had—for the upkeep of God’s Temple. The Temple of the Lord was magnificent and the services went on without ceasing.

Now that we no longer live under the law; we are not required to fulfill the Old Testament commandments: we don’t have to eat kosher foods, nor are we forced to tithe ten percent of our income. But Christ came not to destroy the law, but to fulfill it (Matt. 5:17). That is, He came to fulfill with everything perfect and good; and now it is not the fulfillment of commandments that God requires of His people, but holiness: “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matt. 5:48). It is no longer “an eye for an eye,” but “love” (Matt. 22:39); no longer “give ten percent”, but “I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of Mine, you did for Me ” (Matt. 25:40).

From the very beginning, the time of the holy apostles, the Church of Christ has cared for orphans, fed the hungry, cared for the needy, sent missionaries to those people who had not yet heard the Gospel: to the Romans and Galatians, to the Jews and Greeks, to the Franks and Slavs. And what churches were built! How the people cared for the House of God! And how they loved the Church services!

Sadly, nowadays not very many Orthodox Christian communities can care for the poor, send missionaries, or even hold daily services to the One Who continually cares for us. The clergy who serve in the Holy Altar are forced to leave God’s services and, in violation of canon law, obtain secular employment in order to feed themselves and their families. The Church is now standing with an outstretched hand, begging Christians to give to God’s temple at least a small part of what rightfully belongs to Him.

We are not required to bring a tenth of our income to the Church; we can bring twenty, thirty, or even one-hundred percent, as did the poor widow (Mark 12:42-43). But we can start with a small step. We can at least bring as much as the Old Testament Hebrews, at least the ten percent that rightly belongs to God and not us. But if we don’t have as much zeal for the temple of God as the Old Testament people had, then the Lord will accept and bless even seven or five percent or any other amount offered with a pure heart.