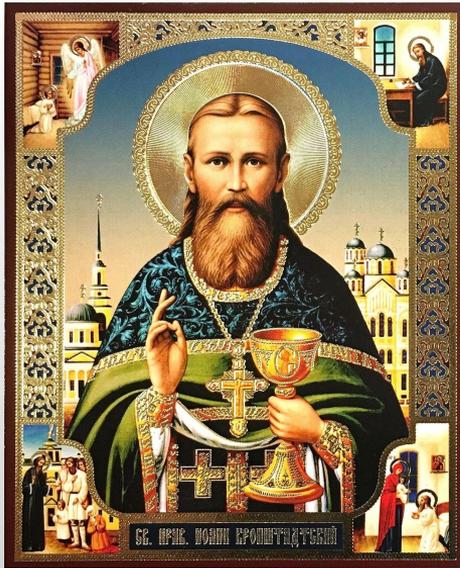


**'When You Fast' and 'When Did We See Thee
Hungry?'**

Fasting and Almsgiving



“Worthless is the charity of the man who bestows it unwillingly, because material charity is not his, but God's gift, while only the disposition of the heart belongs to the man. This is why many charities prove almost worthless, for they were bestowed unwillingly, grudgingly, without respect for the person of our neighbor. So also the hospitality of many persons proves worthless because of their hypocritical vain-glorious behavior to their guests. Let us offer our sacrifices upon the altar of love to our neighbor, with heartfelt affection: 'for God loves a cheerful giver.’”

- St. John of Kronstadt

Orthodox charity is part of the Christian life, whereby we exchange our life for Christ's Life. We give of our resources, prayers, and abilities to our neighbor from our heart, honoring the Image of Christ in them personally. Christ Himself receives this offering, and we exchange our life for His.



“When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.’

Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, **‘Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’** And the King will answer and say to them, **‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.’”**

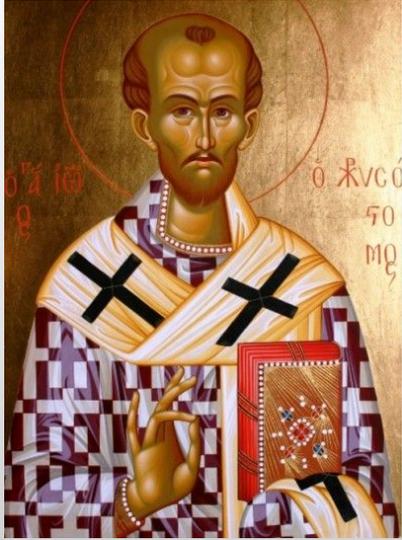


“Then He will also say to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.’

Then they also will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?’ Then He will answer them, saying, **‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.’** And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

- **Matthew 25:31-46**

The Lord, having taken human flesh and come in humility, identifies Himself with the least (in human terms) - with the poor and needy, who are created in His Image. We must see the Lord in each person.



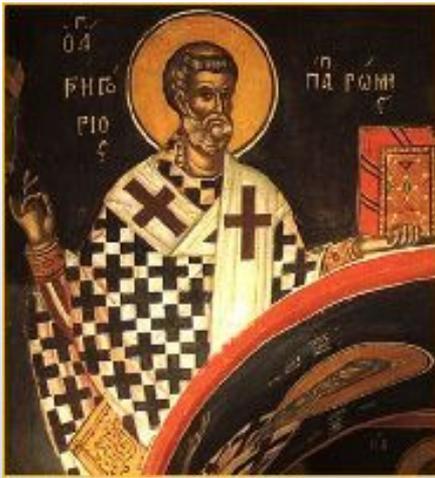
“When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another . . .”

- Matthew 25:31-32

“Neither does He say, ‘The kingdom is likened,’ any more, but openly shows Himself, saying, ‘When the Son of Man shall come in His glory.’ For now is He come in dishonor, now in affronts and reproaches; but then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory.”

- St. John Chrysostom

The Lord spoke many parables about the Kingdom, but here He speaks directly regarding the Final Judgment.



“The abstinent are to be admonished that they then offer to God an abstinence that pleases Him, when they bestow on the indigent the nourishment which they withhold from themselves . . . For a man fasts not to God but to himself, if what he withholds from his belly for a time he gives not to the needy, but keeps to be offered afterwards to his belly.”

- **St. Gregory the Great**

True fasting and almsgiving are inseparably linked. Fasting enables even the poor to give something to those poorer than themselves.

To withhold from oneself in fasting and give to the needy is to give of one's own self, rather than only out of one's surplus.

To fast and give to the poor is to fast most sincerely for the Lord.



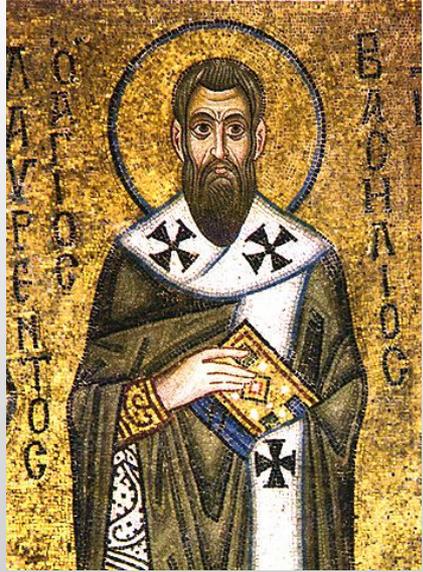
“Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: “The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. And he thought within himself, saying, ‘What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?’ So he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.’ But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?’ **So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.**”

- Luke 12:16-21

While we are not called to judge the ‘worthiness’ of our neighbor to receive charity, we must steward our resources (entrusted to us by God) by giving them in the most beneficial way.

“So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”

- **Luke 12:21**

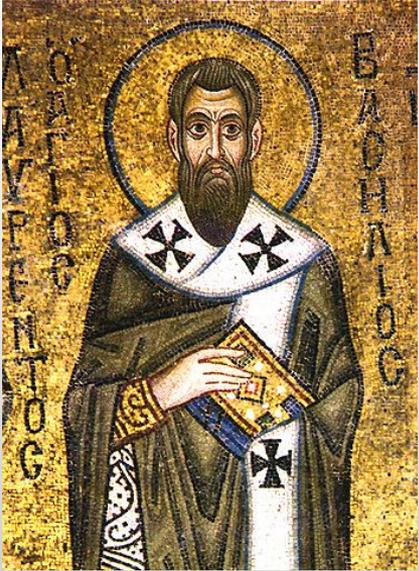


“Yes, while the glitter of gold so allures you, you fail to notice how great are the groans of the needy that follow you wherever you go. How can I bring the sufferings of the poverty-stricken to your attention? When they look around inside their hovels, they do not spy any gold among their things, nor shall they ever. They find only clothes and furnishings so miserable that, if all their belongings were reckoned together, they would be worth only a few cents. What then? They turn their gaze to their own children, thinking that perhaps by bringing them to the slave-market they might find some respite from death. Consider now the violent struggle that takes place between the desperation arising from famine and a parent’s fundamental instincts. Starvation on the one side threatens a horrible death, while nature resists, convincing the parents rather to die with their children. Time and again they vacillate, but in the end they succumb, driven by want and cruel necessity.

“So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”

- **Luke 12:21**

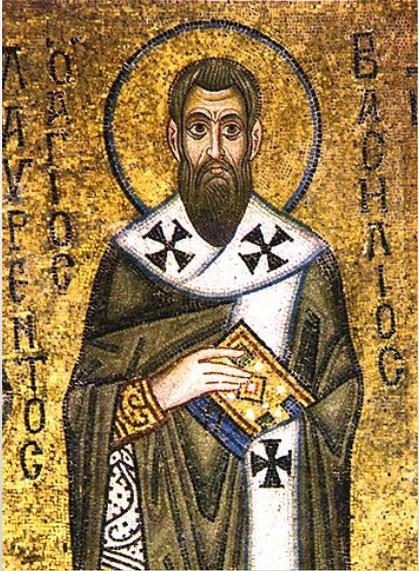
“. . . And what does a parent think at such times? ‘Which one should I sell first? Which one will earn the greatest favor with the grain merchant? Should I choose the eldest? But I cannot bear to do so, since he is the firstborn. The youngest? But I take pity on his youth, as yet untouched by tragedy. This one looks just like his mother, that one shows aptitude in his lessons. Curse the helplessness! What am I to do? Which of my children shall I strike? What kind of beast shall I become? How can I forget the bond of nature? If I hold onto all of them, I must watch them all perish with hunger. If I sent one of them away, how will I be able to look the others in the eye ever again? They will always view me with suspicion and mistrust. How can I manage my household, when I am responsible for the loss of one of my own children? How can I ever sit down at the table, which now has plenty of food as a result of such a decision?’



“So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”

- **Luke 12:21**

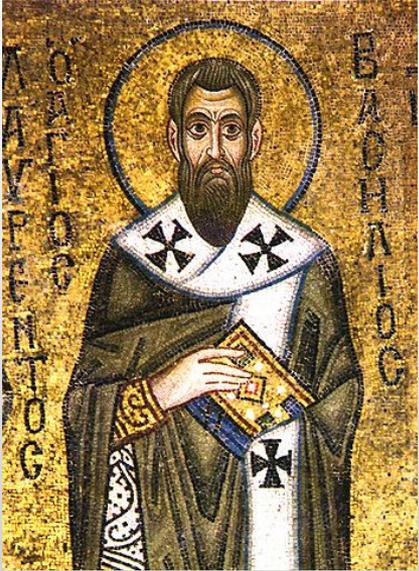
“. . . And while the parents come with tears streaming down their faces to sell the dearest of their children, you are not swayed by their sufferings; you take no account of nature. While famine oppresses these miserable wretches, you hem and haw, feigning ignorance of their plight, and thus prolonging the agony. They come offering their very heart in exchange for food. And yet not only is your hand not stricken with paralysis for taking profits from such misfortune, but you haggle for even more! You wrangle so as to take much give little in return, increasing the tragedy on every side for these wretches. Tears do not move you, groans do not soften your heart, but you remain adamant and unbending. **In everything you see gold, you imagine as gold . . .**



“So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”

- **Luke 12:21**

“ . . . ‘But whom do I treat unjustly,’ you say, ‘by keeping what is my own?’ **Tell me, what is your own?** What did you bring into this life? From where did you receive it? . . . Did you not come forth naked from the womb, and will you not return naked to the earth? Where then did you obtain your belongings? If you say that you acquired them by chance, then you deny God, since you neither recognize your Creator, nor are you grateful to the One who gave these things to you. But if you acknowledge that they were given to you by God, then tell me, for what purpose did you receive them? Is God unjust, when He distributes to us unequally the things that are necessary for life? Why then are you wealthy while another is poor? Why else, but so that you might receive the reward of benevolence and faithful stewardship, while the poor are honored for patient endurance in their struggles?

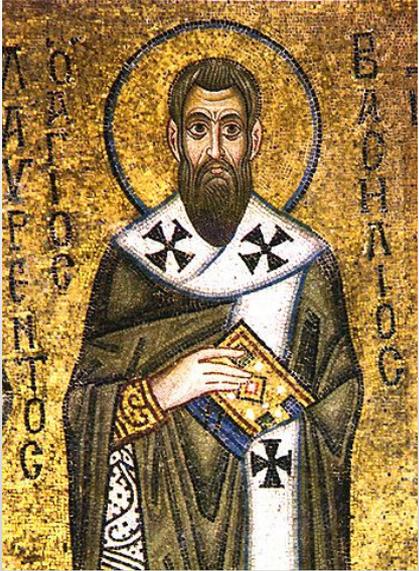


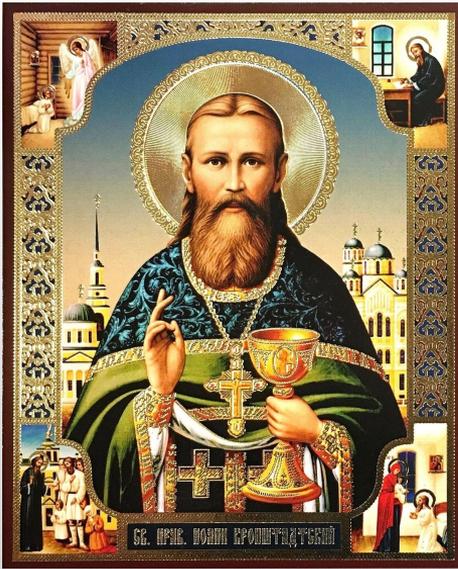
“So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”

- **Luke 12:21**

“ . . . the bread you are holding back is for the hungry, the clothes you keep put away are for the naked, the shoes that are rotting away with disuse are for those who have none, the silver you keep buried in the earth is for the needy. You are thus guilty of injustice toward as many as you might have aided, and did not . . . how great will be the trembling, the sweat, the darkness that surround you when you hear the sentence: ‘You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels . . . ’”

- **St. Basil the Great**





“Why does the Lord allow there to be poor? For your good, so that you may be cleansed from your sins and expiate them, **‘for alms doth deliver from death, and shall purge away all sin’** [Tobit 12:9]; so that you may win suppliants who will pray for you in the persons of those upon whom you bestow your charity, so that the Lord may be merciful to you. ‘Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.’”

“Charity is, first of all, a benefit to those who bestow it.”

- **St. John of Kronstadt**

“My brother is my life.”

- **St. Silhouan**

Almsgiving is an act whereby seek reconciliation with God and forgiveness of sins, not as a ‘generic good deed’, but by honoring the Image of God in our neighbor from our heart.

In our neighbor we encounter Christ.



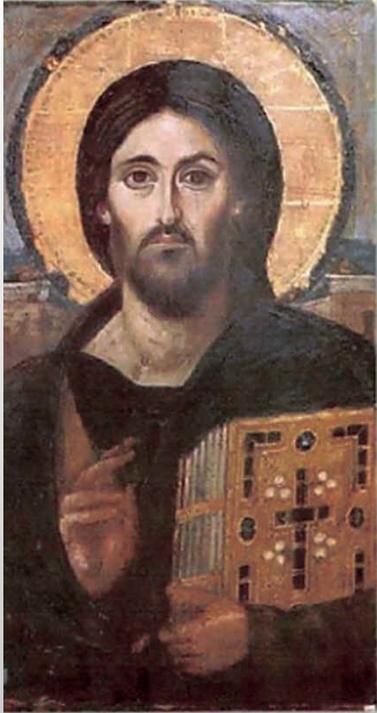
"Do not grieve or complain that you were born in a time when you can no longer see God in the flesh. He did not in fact take this privilege from you. As he says, 'Whatever you have done to the least of my brothers, you did to me.'"

- **St. Augustine**

Hunger, thirst, sickness, need of lodging and clothing may also be seen in a spiritual sense: hunger for the Bread from Heaven, thirst for the Truth, spiritual sickness from sin, and need of an eternal home in Christ's Church.

We each have been entrusted with resources and abilities in varying types and degrees. These we are each called to use for the service of God.

Those blessed with material abundance give to those in need, and they in turn pray for their benefactors. The charity is not only one-sided: each contributes to the other - some with material aid, others in return with their prayers.



“For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then **He will reward each according to his deeds.**”

- **Matthew 25:31-32**

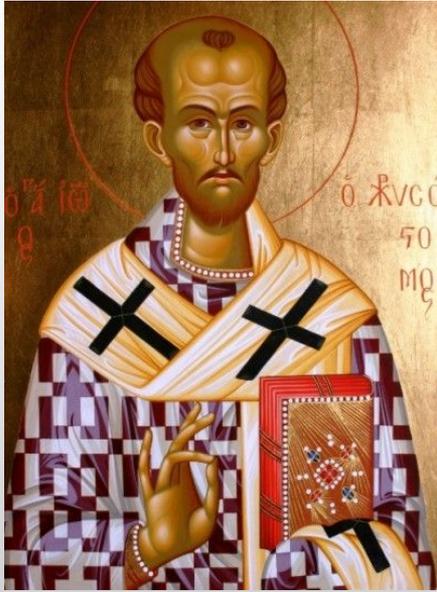
“**If you love Me, keep My commandments.**”

- **John 14:15**

“He both praises the work and honors the intention.”

- **St. John Chrysostom**

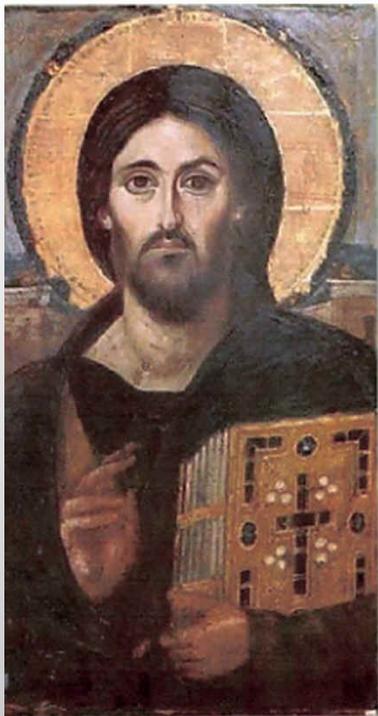
That the Lord will judge every person according to his deeds indicates that He will judge each according to the sincerity of his love - for love is realized in action.



“Should we look to kings and princes to put right the inequalities between rich and poor? Should we require soldiers to come and seize the rich person’s gold and distribute it among his destitute neighbors? **Should we beg the emperor to impose a tax on the rich so great that it reduces them to the level of the poor and then to share the proceeds of that tax among everyone? Equality imposed by force would achieve nothing, and do much harm.** Those who combined both **cruel hearts** and **sharp minds** would soon **find ways of making themselves rich again**. Worse still, the rich whose gold was taken away would feel **bitter and resentful**; while the poor who received the gold from the hands of soldiers would **feel no gratitude**, because **no generosity would have prompted the gift**. Far from bringing moral benefit to society, it would actually do moral harm. **Material justice cannot be accomplished by compulsion, a change of heart will not follow.** The only way to achieve true justice is to change people’s hearts first – and then they will joyfully share their wealth.”

We are not called to outsource works of charity solely to the government or any other entity, but to give genuinely from the heart.

- **St. John Chrysostom**



“For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but **whoever loses his life for My sake will find it**. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then **He will reward each according to his works.**”

- **Matthew 16:25-27**

True fasting and almsgiving are not “generic good deeds”, but actions from the heart whereby we exchange the temporal for the eternal.

The entirety of Christian life consists in the exchange of our life for His Life.

We forego earthly food in fasting to receive the Heavenly Bread. We give up earthly riches to receive the Kingdom which is incorruptible in the Holy Spirit.

Questions / Discussion