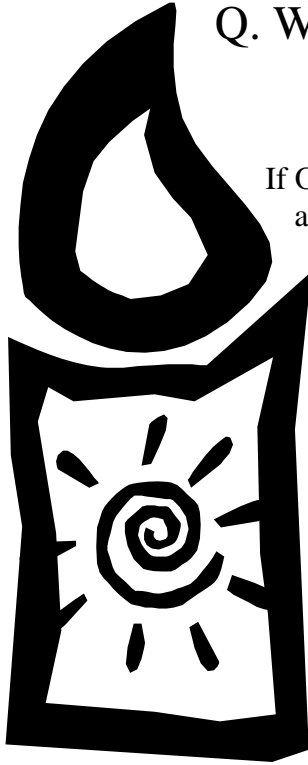


## Q. What If We Actually Give “Tithes and Offerings”?

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If Orthodox Christians in a North American parish with 100 pledging units or households actually gave tithes and offerings, what would that mean in dollars and cents? God knows exactly, and we do not. We can state some numbers based on very general demographics.

### How Much Money Would Be Available for Works of Salvation?

The available data in 2005 suggests that the median income-level for North American households is US \$50,000. A tithe of that is \$5,000. Hence, the General Operating Budget for that parish should receive \$500,000 in income just from the tithes of the households (not counting offerings, just yet, of course). Because of local differences in income, the parishioners should be asked to record in a pledge (“promise”) how much their tithe will probably be in the coming year. Note if God either reduces or increases a family’s income, that household tithe to God is automatically adjusted – downward or upward as the case may be!

What would happen if all American Orthodox Christians gave “tithes and offerings” and thereby stopped robbing God?

Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me! But you say, ‘How have we robbed Thee?’ In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing Me, the whole nation of you! Bring the

whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this,” says the Lord of hosts, “if I will not open for you the windows of heaven, and pour out for you a blessing until there is no more need (Malachi 3:8-10)

Given (say) two million American Orthodox resident in (say) 500,000 households with a median income of \$50,000, the tithe coming to all parishes combined would be 500,000 times \$5,000, or \$2.5 billion. Compared to the North American economy, \$2.5 billion is not much. But, given the amount with which American Orthodox are accustomed to fund the needs of the Church, \$2.5 billion is huge.

**A New Challenge.** But note well, \$2.5 billion income represents a new challenge to Orthodoxy. When we give Christ’s Church \$2.5 billion in tithes via our general operating budgets, we then will have to decide how God wants us to use it. He is already giving us the money, but until we see it in church accounts, we will not believe it!

Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, and seeing you will see and not perceive; for the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are head of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them! (Matthew 13: 14-15)

He has purposes for this money.

For by grace, you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for

**good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them** (Ephesians. 2: 8-10). (boldface added)

I speak not by commandment, but I am testing the sincerity of your love by the diligence of others. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich (2 Corinthians 8: 6-8).

Parishes, dioceses and archdioceses will have to decide how to divide the “pie” and that will call for cooperation and sharing by parishes (such as by tithing on general operating receipts to the diocese), dioceses, missions, institutions, charities and overseas Orthodox. Perhaps the Orthodox teaching of “hierarchical conciliarity,” including deciding by consensus on the will of the Holy Spirit, will regain its proper place in our councils and synods! What a challenge for us all!

### **How Do We Calculate Offerings?**

Tithes are proportional by nature, and as they are linked with income, they are predictable. Offerings are not. Hence, there is no way to plan a budget based on offerings. Each household should budget (for its own planning purposes) for its offerings, based on what it believes God would have it do.

For one illustration of what an Orthodox household could do if the family feels so led by God to help make offerings somewhat more systematic, it can choose to budget (say) 5% of available income for offerings during the year to come. (Again, this “5%” is just a convenience for that particular family budget—offerings have no biblically based percentage or proportion to income and they need not come from just income at all!) But, in this illustration, perhaps 1% is going to International Orthodox Christian Charities, 1% to Orthodox Christian

Mission Center, 1% to Orthodox seminaries and other educational efforts; and 2% reserved to be given to all manner of worthy projects in and beyond the community. There is no practical way to “guesstimate” aggregate totals given the variety of giving outcomes possible. Still, permitting “20/20 hindsight reasoning” for a moment, if “5% of income” turned out to be a reasonable demographic tool our offerings would total \$1.25 billion.

Given the uncertainty over offerings, what can be done for a special parish project such as a building effort? The congregation can be asked to pledge (“promise”) based on the cost and its understood appropriateness. The pledges of offerings to the building fund may be spread over years to come, and become part of the financing plan for the project. Pledges of offerings for a project may be of assets such as parcels of land, of intangible investments such as stocks and bonds, and so forth—not just from income. Ongoing Orthodox Christian charities and ministries generally do deal with the problem of unpredictability in offerings by asking for annual pledges. Note that for any of this to work properly, we all must give “tithes and offerings”.

Remember, tithes are 10% of current income and increase; offerings are not proportional and may be from wealth and assets or income. Neither tithing nor offering implies “rich folks” alone are to give. The poor widow Christ observed offering her two mites, offered 100% of her assets (Luke 21: 1-4). If you lose your job and have no income, your tithe is zero. Your offering is between you and God!

Now, let us have five closing words of caution.

- 1) **Never suggest a dollar amount.** Everyone’s income is different so everyone’s tithe will in fact be different. Never suggest dollar amounts to give unless the person has asked you to help do the math (moving the decimal point one place

to the left usually helps). God knows our hearts and income.

- 2) **Keep it clear.** When you ask for pledges for tithes (for the general operating budget) and pledges for offerings (such as for a parish building project), do the “requests” six months apart from each other so as not to confuse the faithful. Confusing the stewards may produce a pledging disaster based on unforeseen misunderstandings.
- 3) **Plan for annual education.** The main price to be paid by Orthodox leaders, for a good Christian Stewardship performance by all Orthodox, is annual stewardship education—orally and in print, formally and informally—by the most respected and committed clergy and laity.
- 4) **Place stewardship in the by-laws.** Local stewardship expectations need to be enunciated in proper articles of parish by-laws. They must be consistent with biblical teaching (see #5 below) and with existing local parish governance. Guidelines help ensure continuity from forgetfulness.
- 5) **Never forget God.** A risk of being successful and of seeing huge sums of money given is that we may forget that all this is only by God’s grace. With the danger of idolatry in mind, let us end with a giving overview.

Give as a faithful steward of God. God entrusts us, and we account to Him.

### **God Entrusts Us**

#### ***Made Stewards, Genesis 1:26-27***

26. Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”

27. So, God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them (Genesis 1:26-27).

### **We Account to God**

#### ***Parable of the Talents, Matthew 25:14-30***

14. For the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them.
15. And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey.
16. Then he who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and made another five talents.
17. And likewise he who had received two gained two more also.
18. But he who had received one went and dug in the ground, and hid his lord’s money.
19. After a long time the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them.
20. So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, ‘Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them.’
21. His lord said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.’
22. He also who had received two talents came and said, ‘Lord, you delivered to me two talents; look, I have gained two more talents besides them.’
23. His lord said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.’
24. Then he who had received the one talent came and said, ‘Lord, I knew you to be a

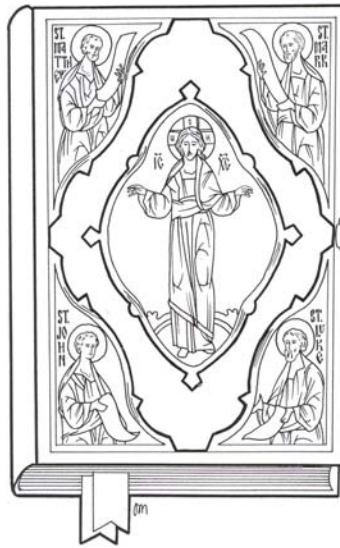
hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed.

25. And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours.'
26. But his lord answered and said to him, 'You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed.'
27. So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest.
28. Therefore take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents.
29. For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away.
30. And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

### ***Judgment Day, Matthew 25:31-46***

31. "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.
32. 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.
33. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left.
34. 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:
35. 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;

36. I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.'
37. Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink?
38. When did we see You a stranger and



38. When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You?
39. Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?'
40. 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.'
41. 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:

42. For I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink;
43. 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.'
44. 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?'
45. 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.'
46. And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life (Matthew 25:18-33).

## **In Giving our Motives are Love and Humility**

### ***Give in secret, Matthew 6:1-4***

1. "Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven.
2. Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.
3. But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,
4. That your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.

### ***Treasure in heaven, (Matthew 6:19-21)***

19. "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal;
20. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.
21. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:19-21).

### ***Two Masters, Matthew 6:24***

24. "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.

### ***Perfect Love, 1 John 4:17-5:3***

17. Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world.

18. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.

19. We love Him because He first loved us.

20. If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?

21. And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.

### ***Chapter 5***

1. Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him.
2. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments.
3. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome

## **Methods: Tithing and Offering**

### ***Don't rob God, Malachi 3:8-10***

Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me! But you say, 'How have we robbed Thee?' In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing Me, the whole nation of you! Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this," says the Lord of hosts, "if I will not open for you the windows of heaven, and pour out for you a blessing until there is no more need. Then I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it may not destroy the fruits of the ground; nor will your vine in the field cast its grapes," says the Lord of hosts. And all the nations will call you blessed, for you shall be a delightful land," says the Lord of hosts (*Malachi 3: 6-12*).

***Tithe, and well you should, Matthew 23:23***

23. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone. Mt23:23

***Poor Widow, Luke 21:1-4***

1. And He looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury,
2. And He saw also a certain poor widow putting in two mites.
3. So He said, "Truly I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all;
4. For all these out of their abundance have put in offerings for God, but she out of her poverty put in all the livelihood that she had."

**Results: Blessings and thanks**

***Returned to you, Luke 6:38***

38. 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." 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" (Luke 6:38)

***More blessed to give, Acts 20:35***

35. I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive' (Acts 20:35)

***Two entire chapters of 2 Corinthians, 8 and 9.***

***If you love Christ, obey Him, John 14:15.***

15. "If you love Me, keep My commandments.

***Walk in love, Ephesians 5: 1, 2***

16. Therefore be imitators of God as dear children.
17. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.