

FIRST FRUITS



Stewardship 2016

Holy Trinity

Greek Orthodox Church

San Francisco



The Bible talks a lot about "first fruits." In the Old Testament this term refers to the first harvested crops or first born calves that were offered to God, and it teaches us that:

God blesses those who put Him first.

Honor the Lord with your substance
and with the first fruits of all your produce;
then your barns will be filled with plenty,
and your vats will be bursting with wine. (Proverbs 3:9)

God wants our absolute best.

The first of the first fruits of your ground you shall bring to the house of the Lord your God. (Exodus 34:26)

God doesn't want us to offer up leftovers.

In the course of time Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. (Genesis 4:3-5)

In the New Testament, first fruits are more than crops and cattle. We learn from St. Paul and St. James that:



Our Lord Jesus Christ saves us by offering His First Fruit: Himself

But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. (1 Corinthians 15:20-22)

God puts us first, so He showers us with gifts.

Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. Every good endowment and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures. (James 1:17-18)

The Holy Spirit gives us the first fruits of salvation.

We ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. (Romans 8:23-24)



The Old Testament teaches us to give God our first and our best. In the New Covenant He gives us a "first fruit" beyond measure: salvation.

There are very tangible ways in which we can respond to this command and this gift.

Pray daily and worship regularly.

Morning prayer and Sunday Liturgy constitute the most simple and powerful ways for us to offer up daily and weekly our first fruits and respond to the first fruit of Salvation. Prayers do not have to be long, but they should be regular and sincere. Some people have the time for a lengthy morning prayer rule, others might only be able to kneel before their icons, recite the Lord's Prayer. What matters is that we give Him our first and our best.

Similarly, if we take the Church's teachings on first fruits seriously, we have no choice but to begin each week with worship: During the Divine Liturgy we partake of the Body and Blood of the One who "offers and is offered."

Do everything for God's glory.

A second way to center our lives on "first fruits" is to make sure that before we say or do something our words and actions glorify God. If the words that come out of our mouths and the deeds that we perform are not the best that we can offer God, then we should think twice before speaking or acting. Guarding our tongues and hands is hard work but we are not in this struggle alone: Because Jesus is the first fruits of salvation and because we have the first fruits of the Spirit, Christians have the power to speak and behave in a Godly manner.

Support the Church through Stewardship.

For the members of the Body of Christ, the Church, there is a third and obvious way that we can be people who take “first fruits” seriously. For the next month or so we will be talking about how we will support Holy Trinity in 2017. We are called to give God our first and our best in everything we do, including and especially Stewardship. We do this not only in obedience to the teachings of the Old Testament, but as a loving response to the gift of salvation freely bestowed upon each of us.



**Please prayerfully consider how
you will offer your first fruits in
the coming year and then return a
completed 2017 Pledge Card to the
church office on or before
December 4, 2016.**



But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the first fruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. (2 Thess. 2:13)