

What should we do with our extra fat?

On August 11th I gave a sermon on Sunday morning as is the tradition to do so immediately following the Gospel reading. After the Divine Liturgy a young boy came up to me and commented on how it was the best sermon he had ever heard me give. I asked him why and he responded, “because I never knew that fat could be a good thing.” It seems that the young boy was significantly insightful or maybe he was just excited that I used the word “fat” in church, no matter what the source of his comment was, I feel it is appropriate to elaborate on that Sunday’s topic. Therefore let us look closely at how we, who are Orthodox Christians living in the most powerful and prosperous country in the world, should allocate our resources within our immediate communities and throughout the world.

It’s a fact that the United States of America possesses 59% of the world’s wealth while we only make up 6% of the world’s population. In addition we consume 25% of the world’s resources. It is important to know how much we have in this great country. For example, if you have a college education or if you have one computer you are more privileged than the other 99% of the people living on this planet. And if you have enough food to eat so you are not malnourished then you are better off than the other three billion people living today.¹ These facts should be sobering and eye opening now let us look at America’s behavior in light of its abundance. I have spent over 6 years living and working in 3rd world countries, and I can say that Americans in general are extremely giving but we need to ask the tough question, “Are we giving enough?” A sign of this country’s possible complacency is seen in the epidemic issue of physical health. The World Health Organization declares “the dominant un-met global health issue with Western countries is obesity”. In America 5 million men and women are defined as “morbid obese”. As the years go by we as a country seem to be eating more and more. In 1970 to 1994 there has been an average calorie consumption increase of 200 calories per day. “Sixty one percent of Americans are overweight enough to begin experiencing health problems as a direct result.”² These dietary observation might be a sign that Americans are over-indulging when they should be sacrificing. Another possible sign of America’s poor use of its abundance is the plague of gambling that overwhelms this country. Two decades ago only 2 states had legal gambling now only 2 states do not have it outlawed. The largest customer of gambling are those people over 65 years of age. In Las Vegas on the average people lose over \$6 billion a year. This is more than many countries Gross National Product. Gambling generates more revenue than movies, spectator sports, theme parks, cruise ships and recorded music combined.³ From what we eat, to our time and our funds we see a trend that does not seem to lead to sharing of abundance but rather hoarding it.

This information is not meant to make a person feel guilty but rather encourage a person to look closely at how he or she uses God’s blessings. We are in a country that is physically, spiritually and economically fat. In the Old Testament the Lord directs us to use fat as a blessing and offer it up to Him. Like the blood of the animal, (Lev. 3:17) the fat was not to be eaten but rather offered up unto the Lord because it was seen as sacred. It was offered up

¹ Figures were deducted from the studies of Dr. Phillip M Harter from Stanford University School of Medicine.

² *How Americans Became the Fattest People in the World*, Lesley Garner, March 2, 2003.

³ Public Broadcast Station “Frontline” website, www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/gamble/etc/facts.html.

as a burnt (Lev. 1:8-9) offering, a peace offering (Lev. 3:9-10) and a sin offering. (Lev. 4:8-10) “The fat” is utilized as a synonym to “the best” (Num. 18:12) and “the finest” (Ps. 81:16) of oil, wine and wheat sacrifices to be offered to the Lord. With biblical understanding we see that “fat” does not need to be seen as a negative attribute of our abundance but rather the opportunity to give back to the Lord out of the plentiful He has given to us. Therefore with this reality, seeing that we have so much compared to the world, let us give to the Lord through giving to His church and the needy. We in America are called to rise to the occasion and strive to offer 10% of our earnings in our stewardship. As Orthodox Christians we are encouraged to tithe within the Old (Gen. 14:20, Levi. 27:30, Deut. 14:22) and the New Testament (Heb. 7:1-10). Our stewardship needs to be THE first check we write not the last one once we figured out what remains after we have paid all our other bills. We must reach out to those in need and help them out of our abundance. America has the opportunity to be the store house for the world and reach out when others are suffering. Remember countries like Somalia, Sierra Leone and the Republic of Congo have Gross National Products⁴ smaller than what is lost in Las Vegas gambling every year. In this sense “fat” can be good. So let us rise to the occasion, glorify God through our abundance and share our fat with our Church and our world.

⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_value