

VITALITIES OF THE VIBRANT ORTHODOX PARISH (Part 2):
THE LOVE OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

by Father Frank Marangos

“Your word I have treasured in my heart, That I may not sin against You.”
Psalm 119:11

What is the location of the world’s richest religious center? The recent opening of the secret cellars of the Padmanabhaswamy Hindu Temple in poverty-filled South India revealed a treasury beyond anyone’s expectation. According to the published inventory, the temple vaults contained over a ton of gold, sacks of diamonds and precious stones, necklaces, gold crowns, thousands of pieces of antique jewelry, idols, and artifacts studded with diamonds and emeralds. Valued at over \$100 billion, the collection displaces the \$15 billion in affluence of the Vatican, the world’s second wealthiest religious competitor.

On Sunday, November 19th, the Annunciation Church of North Miami begun reflecting on the eight vitalities of the vibrant Orthodox Christian parish. Like the eight grand pillars that have supported the weight of the ancient Athenian Parthenon for two and half millennia, resilient Orthodox communities are reinforced by well-formed liturgical, pastoral, and administrative foundations. While not in the same monetary league as the Padmanabhaswamian Temple or Vatican, one may rightly say that these pillars support and protect the inestimable spiritual treasury of Orthodox Christianity.

The first supportive stalwart that characterizes the vibrant Orthodox parish is *philoxenia* (love of neighbor). Described in Part 1 of this series, *philoxenia* is much more than a climate of hospitality. Understood in terms of the Parable of the Good Samaritan, *philoxenia* encompasses the welcome, generosity, and ongoing care that the Christian community is challenged to share with strangers and members alike.

The second pillar of the vibrant Orthodox community is love and faithfulness to Holy Scripture. The Holy Church Fathers overwhelmingly emphasize the value of the Bible. As the living Icon of God’s Word, the Bible is the Book of the Church, and, as such, its crown jewel. It is the Church’s true treasure that facilitates prayer, worship, theological thought and life.

The treasure of Holy Scripture does not require adventures on the high seas, jungle, or desert. One is not required to pass the test of many dangers while following cryptic clues on an old map marked with a mystical “X”. The much-treasured gems, gold, and pearls of Holy Scripture are freely provided to those who are willing to graciously receive and honor them. “The word of God,” insists the Psalmist, “is more desirable than gold, even the finest gold. They are sweeter than honey, even honey dripping from the comb” (Psalm 19:10).

According to Psalm 119, the treasury of the Word of God provides the following 12 gems:

1. Purity – “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.” (Psalm 119:11)
2. Joy – “I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word.” (Psalm 119:16)
3. Discernment – “Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your law.” (Psalm 119:18)
4. Revival – “My soul clings to the dust; revive me according to Your word” (Psalm 119:25)
5. Strength – “My soul is weary with sorrow; strengthen me according to your word.” (Psalm 119:28)
6. Confidence – “Never take your word of truth from my mouth, for I have put my hope in your laws.” (Psalm 119:43)
7. Guidance – “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” (Psalm 119:104-105)
8. Protection – “I have suffered much; preserve my life, Lord, according to your word.” (Psalm 119:107)
9. Hope – “I have put my hope in your word.” (Psalm 119:147)
10. Truth – “All your words are true.” (Psalm 119:160)
11. Peace – “Great peace have they who love your law, nothing shall offend them or make them stumble.” (Psalm 119:165)

12. Understanding – “May my cry come before you, Lord; give me understanding according to your word.” (Psalm 119:169)

According to the Psalmist, “the Lord satisfies the thirsty and hungry soul with what is good” (Psalm 107:9). According to its own national data, 3,000 children die in India every day from hunger-related diseases. The sad irony of the Padmanabhaswamy Temple, is while it was located at the center of the largest undernourished population in the world, its \$100 billion worth of resources that could have been used to satisfy the thirst and hungry, remained entombed in the Temple’s secret cellars,

Holy Scripture is the treasury of each and every Orthodox Christian parish. It provides the life-giving nourishment for effectively satisfying a community’s pastoral, relational, and administrative hunger. According to Saint Paul, “all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17). In the final analysis, love and faithfulness to God’s Word is an indispensable pillar of the vibrant Orthodox Christian parish that freely seek to satisfy thirsty and hungry souls.