

## Praise the Lord, and Pinch the Pyrohy!

*By Fr. Bohdan Hladio*

One day last week I got a phone call at about 7:20 A.M. I was reciting my morning prayers in front of the icon corner in my office, and upon hearing the phone ring my first thought was “Oh no, who died?”. Thank God, no one. It was a woman who was calling to find out where she might order pyrohy! At 7:20 A.M.! While I was praying! But I couldn’t get mad, because from her perspective what she did was absolutely logical. She wasn’t a parishioner, but she, like many parishioners, saw the Church as a service provider. And the service the parish provided was, you guessed it, making pyrohy.

Some parishes do the “perogie factory thing”, some don’t. Whatever the practice in a particular parish, it’s imperative that the faithful never forget that if they want to have a Church they should be ready to pay the bills themselves. But the attitude that we can get the “chuzhi”, or “kseni”, or “goyim” to pay our bills is all too common. And one of the most common ways to do so, if you’re Ukrainian, seems to be by selling pyrohy.

I’m waiting for the day when I drive by a Church somewhere and see a sign reading something like this:

Ss. Peter and Paraskevia Perogie Palace  
*(and worship centre)*

Well, perhaps I’m exaggerating, but one thing is clear. Concerning ourselves too much with paying the bills, or with getting non-parishioners to pay the bills, tends to divert our attention from the real purpose of a Church. Churches exist so that we might praise and serve God.

If we think about it, we see that there is one thing in this world which is due only to God, one thing, which if we offer it to anyone or anything other than God will lead us straight to hell. This thing is worship. Every person, as well as every organization, needs focus.

The focus of the Church is God, and that focus is expressed most clearly in our common prayer and worship.

Just so that nobody thinks I'm against pyrohy (I'm not, I love them!), or against parishioners doing things together for the good of the parish (this is also extremely important, good, and noble), I'll tell you right now that what I'm getting at has to do with balance. It has to do with putting first things first. Most of our Ukrainian Orthodox parishes on this continent are in decline. We often hear well intentioned people speak about the need for parish renewal, about engaging the young people, about "turning things around". In my experience, though, the proposed strategies are almost invariably secular. I've heard all manner of interesting, half-baked, and downright ill-considered ideas about how we can get more people in the doors "so we don't have to make pyrohy". One strategy that I've not yet heard mentioned is prayer.

If the real focus of the Church is worship, then a healthy parish will be a worshipping parish. Parish renewal will always involve liturgical renewal. It's not bad to get together on Tuesday or Thursday morning to make pyrohy, but if the same people are not in Church on Wednesday for the feast day Liturgy, on Saturday evening for the vigil, or at the Liturgy of the Pre-sanctified gifts during lent, then what does it mean? They're just paying the bills to keep open a building they don't use. And God will notice. And He won't be amused.

The true path to parish renewal begins and ends with prayer - personal and communal. When every parishioner says their morning and evening prayers faithfully and attends every Sunday Liturgy, as well as Vespers, Orthros, and Feast day services as often as possible, then things will begin to turn around. The Liturgy isn't the job of the priest - it's the job of the whole parish. It's what gives us our focus as Christians. It's what gives us the necessary knowledge, motivation, and grace to fulfill our calling as Christians. Any attitude towards the Church or the parish which doesn't put active attendance at worship services first is bound to fail.

There are good ways to support our Church as well as not so good ways. Bingo is questionable at best, and renting out the hall for non-Christian worship services is just asking for spiritual retribution, but God gave all of us a brain and we should be able to figure these things out for ourselves. There's nothing wrong with making and selling pyrohy for the good of our parish, nor is there anything wrong with festivals or any other activities where parishioners come together to work for the common good. But our first and most important calling is to be *Homo Adorans* - worshiping man. In our worship of God we fulfill our calling, we support our Church, and we learn who and what we really are as people. Praising God will even teach us why we should be pinching pyrohy at all!

So go out there and pinch pyrohy if you like - just as long as you praise the Lord first, last, and always!