

In Mark 12:41-44 and Luke 21:1-4 we read the story of the widow and her two mites. It's a beautiful reminder of God's love of the giver that gives from the heart. Looking back, it's amazing what God brought about in my life from my gift of one dollar. It's kind of odd to have a special relationship with a great aunt, but I did with Verla Brown. Anytime we were around each other it was generally large family functions, but inevitably we would find each other and spend time. Of course, as life went on, we saw less of each other. I moved away, went to college, got married, and was busy with work, and children. In my late twenty's I heard of Verla's illness, it was cancer. I went to see her several times as she battled, and one of those trips she dug a silver dollar from the back of a picture frame. As a small child I had given it to her exclaiming she was my favorite aunt! That act of giving had bought me her favor, for a lifetime. One day I got the call, Verla was gone, it was time to go home and see her off. Verla had been very proud of my having studied Theology in School and as she would have it, I found myself, along with my father, speaking at her funeral (the Baptist would call it "preaching" her funeral). The service was held at the Church my Father pastored. In attendance, was a then, dark haired Orthodox Christian. A conversation on theological doctrine ensued following the service between my father and Eddie Lambros. After mentioning it briefly my Father kept their conversations to himself. A few weeks later, he approached me saying "Andy there may be something to this Orthodox thing". I heard the metaphorical needle run off the record, that was my entire belief system. My father was one of the greatest Christian apologists I knew. Not having been traditionally trained as I, he was many times over my superior, not many argued the Bible in opposition of my father. If my father said it, he had read it, memorized it and could back it up. His word carried the weight of the world with me. This made me take immediate interest. Midnight Easter service of 2004, my father and I walked through those doors, Bible tucked

under arm, and sat right there on the North side. I was absolutely thunder struck! The visual splendor was over whelming. Beautiful artwork hanging everywhere. The lighting was perfect, fixtures were ornate and golden. The wooden wall across the alter, (eikonostasion), was carved with the most intricate detail and inlaid with the most beautiful paintings. Marble entry (narthex), and columns, marble alter (Solia). Everyone up front (in the alter), were uniformed beautifully and the Priest the most beautiful dressed off all! Their movements were so thoughtful and humble. It was all so well-choreographed. There were candles burning everywhere and a hazy smoke hung in the air (altar boy got carried away with the incense). The sound of bells rhythmically clanging, the language was beautiful, and the tones and music were from another world. A sweet smell enveloped the whole space. I now know I had been transported to worship with the Church triumphant, delivered to the very throne room of God! The following months were full of study and turmoil. I was the interim pastor of a small Baptist community in Richmond Hill, which increased the burden and urgency. They were really expressing their hope that I would take the role permanently. As God would have it, Eddie's office was on the same street as mine, just two doors down. Every evening after work I would go down and ask him questions and listen to his explanations as he prepared for closing. I spent time with now Father Tom Guerry. I went to a monastery. I stayed at the home of Father Gordon Walker, a convert Orthodox priest from the Campus Crusaders for Christ. After several months, my wife and I finally got an appointment with Father John Caparisos, after he took over as interim Priest. We were to meet at his office and the last thing he said was "bring everything you've read and let's see where you are". I rummaged through the whole house gathering books as I went. We arrived at his office and I greeted Father and placed a banker's box of books on the table, and Father reached in taking a sample and said "you've read **all** of these?! I said, "yes sir" and turned to walk out the door. Father said, "where are you going?" I said, "to get the other box". He said "never mind, never mind, have a seat. Not long after my wife and children and I were Chrismated and the youngest two were baptized and brought into The Church.

Matthew 6:19-21 says, Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. Since the time of Christ, we have been taught to give. The Greek Orthodox Church in Savannah dates to the early 1900s. The first building was bought in 1907 at the corner of Duffy and Barnard. They purchased St. Paul's Episcopal Church and renovated it and became St. Paul's Greek Orthodox Church. That was their home until 1941 the purchase of the Lawton Memorial was made for the sum of \$50,000 (\$911,255 adjusted for inflation) and we remain here today. You see, from its inception, this has been a giving Church. As can be assessed from our surroundings, and the many assets The Church possesses, the congregation of years past and present have given generously of their treasure. In my experience I can also testify that this Church gives of itself. Only a few people knew what it cost my family and I to join this Church. We were ostracized, outcast, abandoned by our former Christian world. Both Clergy and laity, family, and friends. There are many that have never spoken to us again. My mother sat on the second pew and cried her eyes out the day we were Chrismated into this Church. She was full of confusion, fear, and the pain of loss. My new Church family stepped in and saved the day! I won't begin to list all the names, there are far too many, and you know who you are. Without the giving of your time and love we wouldn't have made it. I would like to thank each of you, and those before you, that have played a part in our Orthodox Christian journey. There is a whole world of people searching for the truth and the Orthodox Church has it.

Today I give what I am able of both time and money. I give, and I look for the next family or individual that enters those doors with eyes full of wonder and a heart full of hope. In this month of November, the month of giving, I encourage you to continue to look and give with me.

If you ever would like confirmation of where your money, talent and time has gone, come say hello to my family and I, we are your tangible assets. Thank you!

