

Reflections: Our Days at St. Tikhon's Monastery and Seminary

by Fr. John (Richard L.) Armstrong

"What shall I render to the Lord for all His bounties to me?...I will offer to You the sacrifice of Thanksgiving and call on the Name of the Lord" (Psalm 116:12, 17).

It's hard to believe that our time at St. Tikhon's Seminary is coming to an end, although we know that with each end there is a new beginning. We are so glad that we came here and in some ways it will be hard to leave. On the other hand, we're excited about the next phase of our lives—taking that which we have been given here and, with God's help, putting it into practice in a parish community. The Lord led us here, He has faithfully sustained us, and now He is leading us on to serve Him in His holy vineyard.

What has impacted us the most while we have been here?—the love of God reflected in and through His people—from Metropolitan Theodosius to Archbishop Herman to all the clergy and the monks and the professors and the staff and my fellow seminarians and the faithful of all the parishes in this diocese and even back to our home parish in San Diego where the people have continued to support us with their love, prayers, and financial gifts. It's all about the people.

What a privilege it has been to live here and learn here and to prepare for priestly ministry. For me this is a dream come true, the fulfillment of a calling which has taken more than forty years to realize: to become Fr. John serving as a priest in the Orthodox Church of our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ. I am eternally grateful to my family and my friends, as well as those mentioned above, for their patience and their love and for helping me to achieve this goal. And now, knowing that to whom much is given much is required, we set out from here with great excitement and enthusiasm to serve the Lord for the salvation of our souls and the building up of Christ's holy Church.

Each of us, Benjamin (11), David (13), Daniel (14), Andrew (15), Matushka Stacy and myself have all been impacted greatly as a result of participating in the life and ministry of St. Tikhon's Monastery and Seminary. Here are some personal reflections.

Benjamin survived two trips to the emergency room: once from snow boarding and once from a trampoline accident. He has played basketball and baseball and become a Boy Scout. He learned how to bail hay on a farm. But without question, Ben's greatest memories come from the friendship he has made and his serving with His Eminence Archbishop Herman. Ben boasted recently with great joy that he was the only member of our family to carry the Mantia for Vladyka! The grace and love and friendship of God expressed through this godly man have marked Ben for life.

David also played basketball and baseball and became a Boy Scout. He has almost become a Star Scout. David has excelled in school being at the top of his class. He won the Geography Bee for the entire 6th Grade last year. David has also made some meaningful friendships with other kids he met at Church camp who have become e-pals. We all smile when we remember the day when David came into the Altar one Sunday morning with a cross imprint pressed into his forehead. We knew that he had just come from Confession!

Daniel wrestled for two years and went from losing every match in 8th grade to winning Sectionals this year as a freshman. He has also been playing second base this year on the varsity baseball team. When asked his favorite friendships at church, he immediately mentioned the monk, Fr. Anthony. He also mentioned Tom Donlick with whom he served each week in the Altar at St. Tikhon's Church.

Andrew has excelled in two extra-curricular activities in school: business and track and has earned awards for both. He also developed meaningful friendships with several seminarians who encouraged him by their example and the time they spent with him, for example learning Japanese and teaching him how to ring the bells at Church. Eternal thanks to Fr. David Subu, Stanley Brittain, and Bob Pfeiffer.

Matushka reflects that our family has grown here, especially in our love for one another. "This whole experience has really brought us closer together as a family," she said. "Not only have we grown in our faith, but we have had fun here. We have done more than just attend services." Every boy is active at school and involved in sports and we have made our participation in and support of their activities a priority in our busy schedule. "This whole experience hasn't just been about you getting an education or becoming a priest. Our journey to St. Tikhon's and our time here has been a real adventure; it has been one of the best things to happen to us as a family."

Personally, I have been impacted in several ways: (1) My teachers here, by their teaching and their example, have imparted to me a vision of God and life which is grounded in our Holy Orthodox Faith. It is a vision based on the Holy Scriptures, the writings of the Holy Fathers, and the lives of the Saints. It is a vision of beauty, of glory, of hope in God, and of prayer. We must learn to see all of life as a Eucharistic offering to the Lord: All that we have we have received from the Lord as a gift. We offer it back to Him with thanksgiving and He offers it back to us with His blessing and for our salvation. And by being blessed we are to become a blessing to others for the glory of God. God has used each one of my professors to help me grow as a person and in my faith. I want to thank each one of them for their faithfulness to Christ and the sacrifices

they have made to be here so that each of us can receive such an excellent Orthodox education. (2) My relationship with my spiritual father has helped me to become a better person and to grow in my faith. Thank you, Fr. Juvenaly, for your friendship, love, and prayers. All of us thank God for you, Father. (3) I am eternally thankful for the example, love, and prayers of His Eminence Archbishop Herman. What a privilege it has been to get to know you and to learn how to serve under your loving pastoral care. I can never thank you enough for the love you have shown to me and my family. (4) I will cherish forever the friendships I have formed with my fellow seminarians. Our relationships have been forged on the anvil of laughter, hard work, study, service, sweat, frustrations, trials, fasting, prayers, temptations, struggles, and victories together. We entered the seminary education process and the Lord has formed us hopefully more into the likeness of the Lord to make us more fit to serve in His holy vineyard. I had the privilege of walking three of my brother seminarians around the Holy Altar during their ordination to the Holy Diaconate (Fr. Alexei, Fr. Timothy, and Fr. Stephen), and now Fr. Stephen is serving the Lord as a priest . What a privilege to know and to serve with such men. I pray that these friendships will last a lifetime as we serve the Lord together. (5) I want to especially thank all of the faithful of the Holy Trinity parish in Catasauqua, PA for their love and kindness and patience with their rookie priest. I love you all and will remember you always in my prayers. (6) Finally, I thank our loving Lord for His steadfast faithfulness to us during these days. He has faithfully sustained us and blessed us through the good times and through the trials we have faced. We are so thankful that we have had the privilege to live and to grow and to learn in this holy place.

"Oh give thanks unto the Lord for He is good! For His mercy endures forever!" (Ps. 136:1)