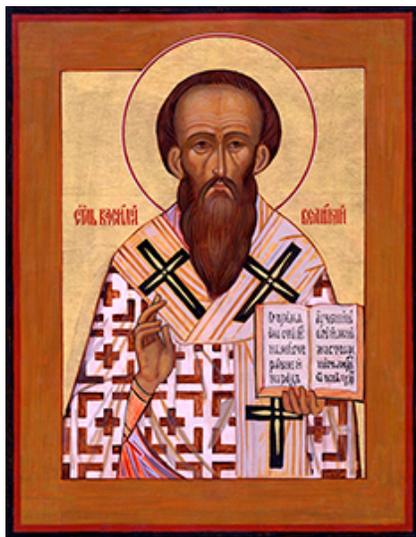


Do Hard Things

This weekly bulletin insert complements the curriculum published by the Department of Christian Education of the Orthodox Church in America. This and many other Christian Education resources are available at <http://dce.oca.org>.



On the first day of the year the Church commemorates Saint Basil the Great. He died on January 1, 379, having been born in 330. His few decades of life were packed full of remarkable achievements.

Both a theologian and lover of prayer, he wrote the Liturgy that we celebrate during Great Lent and on various feast days. He also actively cared for the poor, and his care extended to everyone, not just fellow Christians. No person was turned away from the soup kitchens and places of respite that he established.

As a bishop, Saint Basil had to resolve thorny Church issues and heal divisions, and was required to practice delicate diplomacy with government officials who were not always friendly to the Church. He dealt with the personal and spiritual problems of priests and parishioners. In addition, he wrote rules for monastic communities that have shaped their lives ever since.

At least once, Saint Basil described in writing the toll that all these efforts took on him. In a letter to Bishop Eusebius of Samosata he wrote that he was exhausted from physical weakness and from "a continuous illness, a rigorous winter, and the piling up of business..." Despite this, however, Saint Basil continued throughout his life to serve God and to do hard things.

With the new year, many of us make resolutions. A compelling book encourages teenagers to resolve to serve God in an intriguing way. Its title is "Do Hard Things" (Multnomah Books, 2008).

The book's subtitle is "A Teenage Rebellion Against Low Expectations," and the authors, brothers Alex and Brett Harris, urge fellow teens to join a "rebelution" against a culture that promotes comfort and encourages teens to remain childish for too many years. This culture, they contend, assumes that teens are unwilling and unable to take on challenging tasks, to read deep and thought-provoking books, or to use their freedom for "huge accomplishments." But the Harris brothers believe that teens can do all these things. As they told an interviewer, "The teen years are not a vacation from responsibility. They are the training ground of future leaders who dare to be responsible now."

The authors describe "hard things" that teens have done, such as making a personal effort to pray and read Scripture regularly. Other examples are public things, for example working for a political candidate with admirable views, even when this requires overcoming a fear of speaking to groups.

Without being preachy, the authors liberally mix Biblical verses into their text. Here is Saint Paul on stepping out of one's comfort zone: "God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline" (II Timothy 1:7).

They also cite Lamentations 3: 27: "It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth." Saint Basil, who must have taken on the yoke early to accomplish as much as he did in fewer than fifty years of life, probably liked that verse too.

