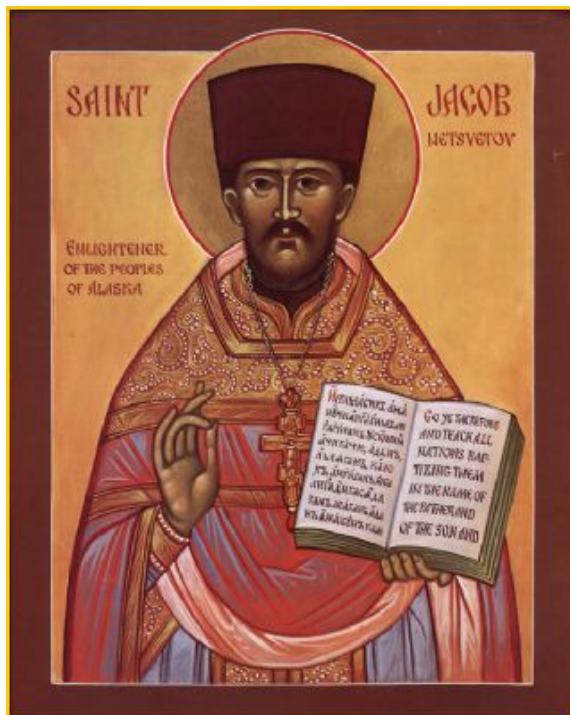


To Bring Light to a Searching People

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 July 26 we remember Saint Jacob Netsvetov, Enlightener of the Peoples of Alaska. Like Saint Paul, he suffered greatly for the faith, but never stopped teaching, guiding, and ministering to people with Christian love.

This day's Epistle reading (I Corinthians 15: 12-19) makes it clear that Saint Paul discovered some wrong beliefs among the Corinthians Christians. He seems to have found it necessary to remind them of the most basic Christian teaching, the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, for he exclaims, "Now if Christ is preached as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?" How frustrating it must have been for Paul to realize that, if this was what some believers had accepted as true, "our preaching is in vain." Worse yet, he warns the Corinthians, if this is what you have come to believe, "your faith is in vain."

That would mean that Paul "would be found to be misrepresenting" God as One who is powerful enough to raise His Son, and who loves us enough to forgive our sins through that resurrection. So, if Christ was not raised, "your faith is futile and you are still in your sins." Those we love who died before us "have perished" rather than having "fallen asleep in Christ" to await the resurrection and judgment of all humankind.

So Paul worked tirelessly, trying to make sure that Christians in the young churches really understood and believed in the Resurrection of Christ, and its meaning for their eternal destiny. His purpose was similar to that of Saint Jacob, born in 1802 on Atka Island, part of the Aleutian Chain. Both men felt the urgent need to present the truth about Jesus Christ, and both suffered and sacrificed to do so.

Having graduated from the seminary in Irkutsk, the newly-ordained Father Jacob arrived in Alaska with his wife and his father in 1829 after a voyage of over a year. The mission territory he was assigned to cover stretched over nearly 2000 miles. Like Saint Paul, he traveled hundreds of miles to reach those who needed to hear the message of the Gospel. Like Paul who supported himself as a tentmaker, Father Jacob hunted and fished to feed himself and his family. He was maligned, falsely accused, troubled by health problems, and frequently exhausted just as Paul was. There may have been times when the people he encountered resisted the Gospel message, either by rejecting it or misunderstanding it, so that he too felt that his "preaching [was] in vain." Within seven years of his arrival in Alaska, his wife and father both died, and the family home burned down.

Troparion - Tone 4

Righteous Father Jacob,
adornment of Atka and the Yukon delta,
offspring of Russian America,
flower of brotherly unity,
healer of sickness,
and terror of demons,
you offered yourself as a living sacrifice
to bring light to a searching people.
Pray to Christ God that our souls may be saved!

The Kontakion for Saint Jacob compares him to Saint Paul, for both took up the cross, followed Christ, and endured hardships. The words of the Troparion for Saint Jacob also seem appropriate for both: "You offered yourself as a living sacrifice to bring light to a searching people."