

**Dedication of the Children's Book *Saint Nicholas and the Nine Gold Coins* to
Archpriest Nicholas Ceko, rector, St. Steven's Serbian Orthodox Cathedral,
Alhambra, California** — by Obren B. (Brian) Gerich, *Hon. D.H.L.*, Trustee Emeritus, St.
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During a trip to New York last year for a St. Vlad's Board meeting, Fr. Chad talked to me about a new children's book that was being published by SVS Press. It was the story of *Saint Nicholas and the Nine Gold Coins*. Over the years I have enjoyed reading about St. Nicholas and the gold coins that he tossed in the window of a family with young girls who could not marry because the family could not provide a dowry for them. St. Nicholas changed that and their lives forever.

Fr. Chad asked me if I would be interested in underwriting this new book and dedicating it to my dear friend and priest for 21 years, Fr. Nicholas. I jumped at that opportunity because I wanted to honor Fr. Nick's dedication to our cathedral and his unrelenting willingness to spend his free time serving and contributing to the Serbian Church and the Holy Orthodox Church.

In Romans 12:6, we read that we have all been given different gifts by God...some for prophesying, some for teaching, some for contributing to the needs of others, etc.

But the real question that we have to ask ourselves is what I am doing with my gift? Have I failed to unwrap it, or do I want to honor God and put it to good use? We all can't have gold coins as our gift as St. Nicholas did, but we have other gifts, just as valuable, that God wants us to put to good use.

It is fitting today—when we are honoring the Special Olympics and the upcoming world games in southern California—that yesterday, while driving, I was listening to KNX radio, and they had a segment called "Hero of the Week." They talked about Marty LaRoche, a golf professional from Santa Margarita. Sixteen years ago while at the local PGA office he heard a father with twin boys with special needs complaining loudly to the head of the PGA that there was nothing for children like his. Marty overheard that conversation and thought: Why can't I, a golf professional, help this family and start a teaching program for special-needs boys and girls? He got other golf pros to assist him and today they have a 10-week program free of charge for these special children and young adults. He said that three of his attendees have qualified for the upcoming games. He said some have been coming for 10 years and still can hit the ball only 5–7 feet, but it is an accomplishment and brings joy to each of them. Marty has turned his God-given gift into a virtue by helping others.

According to the Holy Fathers of the Orthodox Church, our gifts are meant to be used for the benefit of others, which according to the Church's teaching turns them into virtues, which is the entrance fee into heaven—and this is what our Fr. Nick has spent his life doing for us.

In my opinion, Fr. Nick has joined that esteemed group that we should all emulate, which includes St. Nicholas, Marty LaRoche, and others who bring joy to God. God gives each of us 24 hours in each day. Somehow Fr. Nick stretches his to 30 hours a day. He is a dreamer; his mind is always working on new ideas about how he can better serve God and the Orthodox Church. I have had the privilege of working closely with him for the past many years and am honored to be given the opportunity to dedicate this book about a wonderful saint to Fr. Nicholas. I pray that God will grant you many more years.