
St. John Chrysostom Oratorical Festival 2011



TOPICS, TIPS, AND RESOURCES



GREEK ORTHODOX
ARCHDIOCESE OF AMERICA

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St. John Chrysostom Oratorical Festival 2011
Topics, Tips, and Resources

Elementary Division (Grades 4–6)

The purpose of the Elementary Oratorical program is to offer children the opportunity to express their feelings about their Faith and Church, as well as to gain confidence and self-esteem. In addition, it provides an incentive to children for later participation in the Junior and Senior Divisions.

Basic differences between the elementary and the teenage divisions:

1. The elementary division is strictly a local program.
2. There is no judging.
3. The topics are modest but invite creativity: Jesus, prayer, icons, etc.
4. It is designed to fit easily into the Church school program, with flexible topics that coincide with the curriculum.
5. To make it even more interesting, consider having some classes sign a song or re-enact a parable or a Bible story. Be creative!

What are the rules?

- Encourage all children to participate. Teachers and parents should assist the children in choosing a topic. Invite the children to present their talks at a community gathering, perhaps after the Divine Liturgy, as part of a parish event, during a special Oratorical program, or as part of the Junior and Senior Oratorical Festival.
- Each talk should last 30–90 seconds. However, no “strict timing” should be observed. For instance, one child may offer only two or three sentences, and another may offer considerably more. Also, if a child feels more comfortable in using an icon, picture, or poster as part of the talk, this is permissible.

Suggested topics:

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|---------------------|------------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| ○ Jesus Christ | ○ Helping Others | ○ A Smile | ○ The Bible |
| ○ Love | ○ The Cross | ○ My Church | ○ My Family |
| ○ Being Kind | ○ Prayer | ○ Church School | ○ My Favorite Icon |
| ○ Lighting a Candle | | | |

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Junior Division (Grades 7–9)

1. In the Orthodox Church, saints and their icons are presented as examples to be imitated. Discuss one saint who has become an example in your life.

Some directions your speech could take:

- Look for different styles of icons that include a particular saint. How is he or she shown in different traditions of iconography, or in icons with different themes?
- Discuss the saint for whom you were named—or a saint for whom you *wish* you had been named.
- Describe how a saint has always been and will always be an example for you, when you were younger, now, and for your future.

Recommended resources and reading:

- Basil Eleftheriou, *Encyclopedia of the Major Saints and Fathers of the Orthodox Church*, Volumes I–IV (Light and Life, 2000–2009) DRE # FL301–FL304
- Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, Search for a Saint, www.goarch.org/chapel/saintfeast_search
- Greek Orthodox Telecommunications, *Holy Image, Holy Space: Icons from Greece* (DVD, 1 hr.) DRE # GOTEL004
- Mary Hallick, *The Story of Icons* (Holy Cross Orthodox Press) DRE item #FL071
- Vladimir Lossky and Leonid Ouspensky, *The Meaning of Icons* (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, revised ed. 1999)
- Orthodox Church in America, Lives of Saints, www.oca.org/fslives.asp
- George Poulos, *Orthodox Saints*, Volumes 1–4 (Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2005) DRE # FL325–FL328
- Alfredo Tradigo, *Icons and Saints of the Eastern Orthodox Church* (Getty Museum, 2006) DRE # FL401

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Junior Division (Grades 7–9)

2. In St. John's Gospel, Philip invites Nathanael to "Come and see" (John 1:46). What would you want someone to experience in his or her first visit to an Orthodox Christian parish?

Some directions your speech could take:

- Think about the various reasons and occasions for first visits. Some people want to know more about the Faith, but others visit for the sacrament of a friend or family member, for Christmas or Pascha, or for the culture and entertainment of a festival. What might each type of visitor want or need "to see" for the richest experience?
- Have you ever invited anyone to come and see? If so, what did you show and tell your guest? (And did you leave anything *off* "the tour"?) If you have not yet invited anyone, what is holding you back?
- What would make a person's first visit lead to a second visit? How would you encourage him or her to follow up?

Recommended resources and reading:

- Greek Orthodox Archdiocese Department of Outreach and Evangelism, www.goarch.org/archdiocese/departments/outreach/
- Family Outreach Sunday, www.goarch.org/archdiocese/departments/outreach/familyoutreachsunday
- Frederica Mathewes-Green, "Twelve Things I Wish I'd Known: First Visit to an Orthodox Church," www.frederica.com/12-things/

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Junior Division (Grades 7–9)

3. In the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord says, “Blessed are the peacemakers” (Matthew 5:9). What does it mean to be a peacemaker in an age of violence, terrorism, and war?

Some directions your speech could take:

- Who are some of the great peacemakers in history? What attributes did they have? Describe how their lives affected their societies and the world as a whole. How can Christians today learn from these peacemakers?
- Throughout the history of the Orthodox Church, Christian rulers have fought wars. Many saints also have military backgrounds, such as St. Demetrios, St. George, and St. Theodore the General. Are there any circumstances today that might justify violence or warfare? Explain why or why not.
- What does it take to make peace? Is there more to making peace than turning the other cheek or simply not taking an eye for an eye? Explore Christ’s blessing for the peacemakers in the wider context of His teachings (Matthew 5:38–45; Luke 6:27–36), and explain how His words apply to the modern world.
- Read Isaiah 2:4. How does fighting a war and then returning to a time of peace affect a person’s mind and spirit?

Recommended reading:

- Greek Orthodox Archdiocese, Search for a Saint, www.goarch.org/chapel/saintfeast_search
- Kyriaki and Thomas FitzGerald, *Living the Beatitudes* (Holy Cross Orthodox Press 2006) DRE # FL530
- George Poulos, *Orthodox Saints*, Volumes 1–4 (Holy Cross, 2005) DRE # FL325–FL328
- Greek Orthodox Archdiocese, Armed Forces and VA Chaplains, www.denver.goarch.org/military_chaplains
- Orthodox Peace Fellowship, www.incommunion.org
- Stanley Harakas, *The Orthodox Church: 455 Questions and Answers* (Light & Life, 1988) DRE # FL015

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4. Discuss the spiritual discipline of fasting in light of our age of increasing obesity. How does fasting compare with diets that have the purpose of achieving “model” appearance?

Some directions your speech could take:

- Who is/are our models for Christian life? Does their diet include more than food?
- What is the relationship of your inner spirit and your outward appearance? (See Luke 18:10–14.) In what ways are you a model?
- Obesity is defined as excessive body weight in relation to height. What are other types of excess and imbalance that can be addressed by spiritual disciplines?

Recommended reading:

- Thomas Hopko, *The Orthodox Faith*, Volume IV: Spirituality (Orthodox Church in America, 1981; available at www.oca.org/OCorthfaith.asp) DRE # FL008
- Kallistos Ware, “When You Fast” DRE # P24
- George Grube, *The Orthodox Church A to Z* (Light & Life, 2007) DRE # FL017
- George Grube, *What the Church Fathers Say About...* Volumes 1–2 and 3 (Light & Life, 2005) DRE # FL305 & FL357

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5. Clean water is a precious commodity that is becoming even scarcer in many parts of the world. It also features prominently in many Bible stories. Discuss the importance of water as a symbol and in Orthodox liturgical life.

Some directions your speech could take:

- Discuss the biblical references in the petitions and hymns from one sacrament or feast that features water.
- Choose one “water story” from the Bible and discuss its appearances in various sacraments, readings, and feasts.
- Explore one property and use of water in the Bible, liturgy, and life.

Recommended reading:

- Greek Orthodox Archdiocese, Liturgical Texts, www.goarch.org/chapel/liturgical_texts
- Search www.goarch.org and a Bible concordance for significant words and phrases from Scripture, such as “flood,” “drought,” “thirst,” “Red Sea,” “Jordan River,” etc.
- Anthony Coniaris, *Sacred Symbols that Speak*, Volumes I and II (Light & Life, 1985, 1987) DRE # FL630 and FL631
- Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, “Sins Against Nature and God,” statement on the Gulf of Mexico oil spill (May 9, 2010), www.patriarchate.org/documents/sins-against-nature-and-god
- Religion, Science, and the Environment, *The Arctic: The Consequences of Human Folly*, www.rsesymposia.org; other films also available (DVD, 30 min.) DRE # FL641
- *National Geographic* (April 2010)
- Greek Orthodox Telecommunications, *Epiphany: Festival of Lights* (DVD, 1 hr.) DRE # GOTEL031
- Greek Orthodox Telecommunications, *The History and Holy Sacraments of Orthodox Christianity: Baptism and Chrismation* (DVD, 46 min.) DRE # GOTEL010

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Senior Division (Grades 10–12)

1. In the past few years, the issue of bullying—including cyberbullying—has been in the news. How should a Christian respond to the problem, especially in light of Jesus’s teaching to turn the other cheek (Matthew 5:39)?

Some directions your speech could take:

- Jesus preached nonviolence—but not necessarily silence—in response to evil and violence. What is a Christian response to the often-anonymous verbal abuse of cyberbullying?
- Read the Sermon on the Mount in its entirety (Matthew 5–7). What does Christ teach about bullies and the bullied?
- What approaches do various groups—such as the government, your school, and advocacy organizations—take on preventing and responding to bullying? How can you build on these to reflect Orthodox Christian beliefs?

Recommended reading:

- “Parent to Parent: Bullying,” *PRAXIS* magazine vol. 10, no. 1 (Fall 2010), available at www.religioused.goarch.org
- George Grube, *What the Church Fathers Say About...* Volumes 1–2 and 3 (Light & Life, 2005) DRE # FL305 & FL357
- STRYVE (Striving To Reduce Youth Violence Everywhere), www.safeyouth.gov
- Bullying Information Center, www.education.com/topic/school-bullying-teasing/
- Elizabeth Meyer, “Back to School: Christian group against anti-bullying efforts” *Psychology Today* (August 30, 2010), www.psychologytoday.com/blog/gender-and-schooling/

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2. St. Paul encouraged the Christians in Ephesus to “grow up” (Ephesians 4:13–15). What is Christian maturity, and how does one become a mature Christian?

Some directions your speech could take:

- What are the virtues of childhood and adulthood, as described in Scripture and by the Church Fathers? What about innocence, experience, naïveté, wisdom, and so on?
- Look at the entire Epistle to the Ephesians, especially chapters 4–6. How common today are the “growing pains” that the Christians in Ephesus were facing?
- What roles do our Christian environment, religious education, experiences in the Church, and spiritual guidance play in our formation and maturation? Are there other activities that promote Christian growth?

Recommended reading:

- George Grube, *What the Church Fathers Say About...* Volume 3 (Light & Life, 2005)
DRE # FL357
- Thomas Hopko, *The Orthodox Faith*, Volume IV: Spirituality (Orthodox Church in America, 1981), available at www.oca.org/OCorthfaith.asp DRE # FL008
- J. Oswald Sanders, “What Constitutes Christian Maturity?” *Knowing & Doing* (Summer 2005; from *In Pursuit of Maturity*, Lamplighter Books, 1986, pp. 19–25), www.cslewisinstitute.org/files/webfm/knowning_doing/ChristianMaturity.pdf

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3. Discuss what it means to be a member of the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12–26) in our age of extreme individualism and independence.

Some directions your speech could take:

- How do the sacraments establish and reinforce our membership in the Body of Christ?
- The Desert Fathers and Mothers lived a life of extreme solitude. How is this compatible with being a member of the Body of Christ? You might also compare and contrast this way of life with one or more of the modern efforts to be independent (e.g., going “off the grid” or “buying nothing,” the Tea Party, the Libertarian Party).
- Contrast the Orthodox understanding of the Church as the Body of Christ with the culture of individualism and independence in American society and religion. (You might discuss a best-selling religious book that you have read with a discerning eye. Which parts should be adapted, adopted, or scrapped?)

Recommended reading:

- Barbara Pappas, *The Christian Life in the Early Church and Today according to St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Amnos Publications, 1989) DRE # FL290
- Anthony Coniaris, *These are the Sacraments* (Light & Life, 1981) DRE # FL551
- John Chryssavgis, *In the Heart of the Desert: The Spirituality of the Desert Fathers and Mothers* (World Wisdom, 2008) DRE # FL357
- Benedicta Ward, translator, *The Desert Fathers: Sayings of the Early Christian Monks* (Penguin Classics, 2003) DRE # FL356

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4. What are the most attractive points that Orthodox Christianity offers to teenagers today, and how can we use them to bring young people to the Church?

Some directions your speech could take:

- Have you ever invited a peer to a Divine Liturgy or a parish youth event? If so, what did you show and tell your guest? (And did you leave anything *off* “the tour”?) If you have not yet invited anyone, what is holding you back?
- Read the accounts of teens and adults who have discovered Orthodox Christianity, and/or introductions to the Church written for audiences from other traditions. Are these stories relevant? Can these resources help you reach out to other teenagers?
- The challenge of evangelism goes beyond bringing new members to the Church. It includes keeping these new members as well as reinvigorating “cradle” Orthodox. What happens after “come and see” and/or baptism?

Recommended reading:

- Greek Orthodox Archdiocese Department of Outreach and Evangelism (and Family Outreach Sunday), www.goarch.org/archdiocese/departments/outreach/
- Many stories by converts and seekers (current and former) are available in print and online, by authors such as Daniel Clendenin, Marjorie Corbman, Peter Gillquist, and Frederica Mathewes-Green, and at sites such as journeytoorthodoxy.com and orthodoxhistory.org
- Introductions to Orthodox Christianity and responses to other traditions abound:
 - Marc Dunaway, *Orthodox Answers to Frequently Asked Questions* (Conciliar Press, 2002) DRE # FL202
 - Constantine Mathews, *Eastern Orthodoxy Compared* (Light & Life, 2006) DRE # FL040
 - Paul O’Callaghan, *An Eastern Orthodox Response to Evangelical Claims* (Light & Life, 1984) DRE # FL204
 - Theodore Pulcini, *Orthodoxy and Catholicism: What Are the Differences?* (Conciliar Press, 1995) DRE # FL203

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5. St. Basil the Great wrote, “Wealth left idle is of no use to anyone, but put to use and exchanged it becomes fruitful and beneficial for the public” (*I Will Tear Down My Barns*, ch. 5). Explore this statement in light of the financial insecurity of the last few years and of modern financial practices in general.

Some directions your speech could take:

- Begin by reading the Parable of the Rich Fool (Luke 12:15–21) and St. Basil’s commentary on it in *On Social Justice*.
- In the past decade, many Christian authors and speakers have presented variations on the “prosperity Gospel.” What is the relationship between Christianity and wealth and capitalism? What are the outlines of the debate, and what would St. Basil’s argument be?

Recommended reading:

- St. Basil the Great, *On Social Justice*, “I Will Tear Down My Barns,” pages 59–71 (St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2009) DRE # FL301
- Greek Orthodox Archdiocese Stewardship Ministries, www.stewardship.goarch.org
- Hanna Rosin, “Did Christianity Cause the Crash?” *The Atlantic* (December 2009), www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2009/12/did-christianity-cause-the-crash/7764/
 - Greg Forster, “Christianity Caused the Crash?” *The American* (December 2009), <http://american.com/archive/2009/december-2009/christianity-caused-the-crash>
- Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, “Catechetical Homily on the Commencement of Great Lent” (February 12, 2010), www.patriarchate.org/documents/lent2010
 - Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate* (Charity in Truth), papal encyclical (June 29, 2009), www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/index_en.htm
 - Joseph Loconte, “Morals, Markets, and the Pope,” *The American* (July 2009), <http://american.com/archive/2009/july/morals-markets-and-the-pope/>