FAMILY CONNECTIONS

Summer Vacation: Renewing the Powers of the Soul

by George Stavros, Ph.D.

"I'm bored... there's nothing to do... are we there yet... play with me." These are the calls of our children during summer vacation. Rather than hearing these statements as pesky intruders, it is possible to think of them as voices crying out from the wilderness of the young soul, seeking activity, connection, and stimulation within the safe environment of the family

The Orthodox Christian spiritual tradition thinks of the human being as having a powerful ability, the ability to see God and His creative love in all things. This ability is located within the nous. The nous is that part of each of us which looks out into the world, at other people, and into our own hearts and tries to make sense of what it sees. The healthy nous always sees God's love at work. The broken or injured nous tends to be more self-serving, competitive, fearful, vindictive, unrealistic, and deceptive. Most of all, the nous is seeking ways in which to engage others, and all of God's creation, with the powers of the soul. While our spiritual tradition speaks of many powers of the soul, the ones most commonly referred to are thymos, epithymia, and dianoia.

Each of these powers requires loving care, discipline, and exercise in order for the nous to do its work of finding God's

THYMOS

Thymos is the fiery power of healthy aggression, and it is the basis for virtues such as courage, protectiveness, honor, moral strength, and righteousness. It is what gets tapped into when children defend peers against unfair attacks. It is the source of conviction in children saving "no" to temptation or pressure from schoolmates. Injured thymos is the source of bitter rivalry, deceptive game-playing tactics, and hopeless resignation.

EPITHYMIA

Epithymia is the magnetic desire for beauty and connection, and it is the basis for the human ability to reach out in compassion and affection, to appreciate deeply the beauty of art and the natural majesty of the created world. Injured epithymia is the source of exploitative relationships, ones designed to gratify only one person. Injured epithymia triggers greed, relentless hunger, and distorted desire for control of beautiful objects.

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For more information about the center's ministries please contact the center at: 79 Saint Basil Road Garrison, NY 10524 Phone: (845) 424-8175 Fax: (845) 424-4172 Email: familycare@goarch.org Website: www.family.goarch.org

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DIANOIA

Dianoia is the human ability to reason, to make sense of things in an intellectual way, to find meaning in the events and situations of everyday life. Healthy dianoia is realistic, with an ever-present hopefulness. It finds meanings which are intellectually sound while still remaining open to mystery. Unhealthy dianoia either insists on absolute and rigid explanations for events, or gives up any hope that there is life-giving meaning to be found.

The Powers of the Soul on Vacation

The powers of the soul, then, need both discipline and freedom in order to blossom. They require both healthy input (prayer, images, relationships, teaching) and opportunities for vigorous and safe expression. Summer vacation is an ideal time to try out some ways to build up the powers of the family's soul. The key here is to participate in activities mindfully and skillfully, allowing the activities to serve as expressions of thymos, epithymia, and

PRAYERFUL STRUCTURE

The best structure for developing healthy powers of the soul is the structure of everyday life. Make use of the events and transitions during vacation to build in a prayerful mindfulness, a constant gratitude, for God's loving presence with

Adopt a prayerful orientation to each day of the vacation. Without letting this become burdensome, some ways to do

- Start each leg of the journey with a prayer and the sign of the Cross
- Say a prayer before each meal
- Recite the Jesus Prayer out loud, together, 5-10 times, once each day
- Spend 3-5 minutes per day while driving reciting the Jesus Prayer silently
- End each day with a prayer review of the day, emphasizing gratitude
- Bring an icon to keep by each family member's bed

PRACTICE

One of the keys to spiritual life is nepsis, or watchfulness. Basically, this means we have to stay awake and aware of what we are doing. This takes practice. The good news, however, is that you are supposed to still have fun, maybe even more because you notice that you are having fun. You can practice building up and renewing the powers of the soul with the activities of the vacation. This can include:

- Building sandcastles
- Hiking and swimming
- Miniature golf
- Watching sunrises and sunsets

- Stopping at scenic views
- Showing each other physical affection
- Eating great, fresh food
- Going to movies
- Reading books
- Talking to each other
- Playing road games

Conclusion

In the end, this is meant to be simple, and yet, it is never easy. It can be very difficult to develop a sense of awakeness, especially on vacation.

At the same time, the powers of our souls cry out for this. By tapping into the simple structures and rhythm of a prayerful vacation, the whole family can experience their time together with abundance and pleasure.

George Stavros is Executive Director of the Danielsen Institute at Boston University and a Clinical Associate Professor of Pastoral Psychology. He is a licensed psychologist, certified pastoral counselor, and a graduate of Holy Cross School of Theology. His clinical, teaching and research interests are in psychotherapy training and the connection between depth psychotherapy and Eastern Orthodox theology.

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Family Focus on Pentecost

On June 23 we celebrate the Feast of Pentecost, which is celebrated 50 days after the Resurrection of our Lord. At Pentecost, the disciples received the Holy Spirit as tongues of fire, fulfilling the promise that Christ had given them while He was still with them. The Holy Spirit was the Comforter Who would lead them into the fullness of the Truth concerning God.

They received Him as preparation to evangelize the world and establish Christ's

As Orthodox Christians, we each receive the seal of the Holy Spirit when we are chrismated into the Faith. This is our personal Pentecost.

The feast reminds us of our apostolic calling as baptized and chrismated members of the Church—to spread the Gospel in word and deed wherever we happen to find ourselves. To learn more about Pentecost visit http://www.goarch. org/special/listen_learn_share/pentecost.

Offer Prayer

Blessed are You, O Christ our God, who made fishermen all-wise, sending down upon them the Holy Spirit, and through them drawing all the world into Your net. O Loving One, glory to you. -Apolytikion of Pentecost

Interested in chanting? Unfading Rose has a CD of the Apolytikia of the Great Feasts in Greek and English www. unfadingrose.com.

Read Together Gospel: John 7:37-52; 8:12 Epistle: Acts of the Apostles 2:1-11 After you finish each of the readings, ask the following three questions:

- What is happening in this Bible
 - What does this mean in our lives as



Orthodox Christians?

• What questions do we have? (Write them down and go over them with your

To Do Together

• Pentecost Mural-Create a mural illustrating the scene from the Epistle reading for Pentecost (Acts 2:1-11)

Imagine it carefully and draw the vivid images—the strong wind and the tongues of fire that ignited the apostles in undertaking the evangelization of the world.

 Fishers of Men— Look at the Apolytikion of Pentecost above and discuss how you can be "fishers of men.

Consider which tools and skills you would need to gather and cultivate in order to carry this out. Challenge your family going forth to be witnesses of your faith to others through your actions!

• Prayer to the Holy Spirit—Gather as

a family, especially during the eight days that we celebrate this feast, and offer the following prayer to the Holy Spirit:

O Heavenly King, the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, Who art present everywhere and fills all things; Treasury of blessings and Giver of life; come and abide in us and cleanse us from every stain, and save our souls, O Gracious One.

For Inspiration

When Orthodox Christians confess, "I believe in one—APOSTOLIC church," apostolic does not refer only to apostolic succession. More importantly, it implies having an apostolic fire and zeal to preach the gospel, 'to every creature' (Mk 16:15), because it nurtures its members so that they may become 'witnesses in Jerusalem and in Judea and Samaria, to the end of the earth' (Acts 1:8). — Archbishop Anastasios of Tirana, Durres, and All Albania.