
ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM ORATORICAL FESTIVAL 2009



TOPICS, TIPS, AND RESOURCES



GREEK ORTHODOX
ARCHDIOCESE OF AMERICA

DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

(800) 566-1088 FAX (617) 850-1489

Junior Division

Grades 7–9

Junior Division Topic 1

In his First Baptismal Instruction (ch. 44), St. John Chrysostom writes, “You must act and deliberate in all things with the knowledge that He is everywhere with you.” Discuss how a Christian can remain aware of the presence of God in his or her life.

Some directions your speech could take:

- In baptism, we receive the Holy Spirit. How do the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22) help someone remain aware of God’s presence?
- St. John Chrysostom uses the words “act and deliberate”: in other words, your actions and thoughts ought to be oriented toward God. In your daily activity, how is that possible?
- You, most likely, were baptized as a baby—unaware of what was occurring. Revisit your baptism and reflect on its importance for you today.

Suggested Resources

- *Baptism and Chrismation*. DVD. Greek Orthodox Telecommunications, Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America.
- Anthony Coniaris. *Sacred Symbols that Speak, vol. II*. Light and Life, 1987.
- St. John Chrysostom. *Baptismal Instructions*. Harkins, ed. Newman Press, 1963. Ancient Christian Writers 31: pp. 40–41.
- Fr. Thomas Hopko. *The Orthodox Faith, vol. IV: Spirituality*. Orthodox Church in America Department of Religious Education, 1998.
- Michael Keiser. *A Beginner’s Guide to Spirituality: The Orthodox Path to a Deeper Relationship with God*. Conciliar Press, 2007.
- *Put on Christ: Baptism and Chrismation*. CD-ROM. Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America Department of Religious Education, 2000.

Junior Division, Topic 2

“I grieve and am pained that all people do not know Paul as much as they ought to know him,” writes St. John Chrysostom in his commentary on the epistle to the Romans. Discuss aspects of the life and ministry of St. Paul that show the importance and the need for the people of today to know St. Paul.

Some directions your speech could take:

- Explore St. Paul’s conversion experience from a persecutor of Christians to Christianity’s greatest missionary. What does his conversion say about God’s forgiveness?
- Explore elements of St. Paul’s missionary activity in the Acts of the Apostles. Explore one of his Epistles in the New Testament. In either case, are there themes or issues that are important for Christians today?

Suggested Resources

- Anton Vrame. “A Year of St. Paul.” *Praxis* 8, no. 1 (Fall 2008).
- Fr. Thomas Hopko. *The Orthodox Faith, vol. III: Bible and Church History*. Orthodox Church in America Department of Religious Education, 1998. See especially chapter 3.
- Loyola Press. “The Year of Saint Paul” Web site: www.yearofsaintpaul.com.

Junior Division Topic 3

The ancient Greek word “agon” or “agonas” was used to describe athletic activities. It was also employed by early Christians to describe the way a Christian should live. How does the effort to live a Christian life resemble an athletic activity?

Some directions your speech could take:

- Is Christian faith an individual event or a team sport? How is it both?
- What does it take to be a successful athlete? What does it take to be a successful Christian?
- How are practice (for the Christian “askesis”) and competition related? Against whom does an athlete compete? Against whom does a Christian compete? What is the prize that the athlete and the Christian both seek?

Suggested Resources

- Michael Keiser. *A Beginner’s Guide to Spirituality: The Orthodox Path to a Deeper Relationship with God*. Conciliar Press, 2007. See especially chapter 2, “Discipline and Training.”
- Fr. George Grube. *What the Church Fathers Say About...* Light and Life, 2005.

Junior Division Topic 4

St. John of Damascus wrote, “What the book does for those who understand letters, the image does for the illiterate” (Treatise 1, *Against the iconoclasts*). What is the proper relationship between the images one sees and the lifestyle one leads?

Some directions your speech could take:

- Images are not neutral. They communicate ideas, feelings, as well as information. They also carry with them the point of view of their creator. What images do you surround yourself and why do you admire them?
- How can images be forces for good? How can they be forces for evil? How have images influenced historic events? How do images influence the way you live your life?
- How are you an image (“icon”)?

Suggested Resources

- Anton Vrame. *The Educating Icon*. Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1998. See especially chapters 3 and 4.
- Constantine Cavarinos. *The Icon: Its Spiritual Basis and Purpose*. The Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, 1973.

Junior Division Topic 5

In November 1948, Archbishop Athenagoras of America was elected Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople and enthroned in January 1949. Who was Patriarch Athenagoras of Constantinople and what is his legacy to the Orthodox Church and Christianity?

Some directions your speech could take:

- Interview someone who knew Archbishop and Patriarch Athenagoras (Spyrou). What does he or she remember about this very charismatic leader of the Orthodox Church?
- What were some of the challenges that Archbishop and Patriarch Athenagoras faced in America and as Patriarch? How did he face them?
- Patriarch Athenagoras opened up a relationship with the Roman Catholic Church, after hundreds of years of no contact at all. How has Christianity been affected by this historic breakthrough?

Suggested Resources

- George Papaioannou. *From Mars Hill to Manhattan: The Greek Orthodox Archdiocese under Patriarch Athenagoras I*. Light and Life, 1976.
- Anton Vrame. "Patriarch Athenagoras: A Witness of Orthodoxy." Patriarch Athenagoras Orthodox Institute Web site: www.orthodoxinstitute.org/athenagoras.html.
- E. J. Stormon. *Towards the Healing of Schism: The Sees of Rome and Constantinople*. Paulist Press, 1987.

Senior Division

Grades 10–12

Senior Division Topic 1

“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16). Discuss how reading the Bible regularly can benefit a Christian today.

Some directions your speech could take:

- If you were teaching someone about the Bible, what would you teach? What recommendations would you give about incorporating the Bible in one’s life?
- How have you been influenced by certain stories or passages from the Bible?
- In addition to the Bible, what other books, resources, and activities are parts of your spiritual life?

Suggested Resources

- “The Bible: God’s Revelation to Man.” *Orthodox Study Bible*. Thomas Nelson and St. Athanasius Academy of Orthodox Theology, 2008: pp. 1753–55.
- Fr. Stanley Harakas. *Orthodox Christian Beliefs about the Bible*. Light and Life, 2003.
- Fr. Thomas Hopko. *The Orthodox Faith, vol. III: Bible and Church History*. Orthodox Church in America Department of Religious Education, 1998. See especially chapter 1.
- Fr. Theodore Stylianopoulos. *Bread for Life*. Department of Religious Education Greek Orthodox Archdiocese, 1980.
- Metropolitan Kallistos (Ware). “How to Read the Bible.” *Orthodox Study Bible*. Thomas Nelson and St. Athanasius Academy of Orthodox Theology, 2008: pp. 1757–66.

Senior Division Topic 2

“Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you? If any one destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him. For God’s temple is holy and that temple you are” (1 Corinthians 3:16). How do you translate these words of St. Paul into a lifestyle in view of society’s obsession with totally different lifestyles?

Some directions your speech could take:

- The Book of Genesis (1:26) tells us that humanity is created in the image and likeness of God. What does this say about the way we treat our bodies?
- People wear certain brands to project a certain image of themselves. How are these consistent and inconsistent with Christian values?

Suggested Resources

- Metropolitan Kallistos (Ware). *The Orthodox Way*. St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1995. See especially chapter 3, “God as Creator.”
- Fr. George Grube. *What the Church Fathers Say About...* Light and Life, 2005.

Senior Division Topic 3

Jesus said, “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God” (Matthew 19:24). What is the appropriate attitude of a Christian towards money and wealth?

Some directions your speech could take:

- The Orthodox Church, throughout its history, has taught that to be a lover of Christ, one must be a lover of humanity—a philanthropist. How does having wealth make one more responsible for others?
- The Bible has many passages about wealth and poverty. For example: the parable of the widow’s offering (Mark 12); the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16); and the story of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5), to name just three. Ideas about stewardship, tithing, and the jubilee, where all debts were forgiven, can all be found in the Bible, too. Choose one of these passages or ideas and explore how its teachings about money and wealth are relevant today.
- Which is more important: having a career that earns a great deal of money or one that is fulfilling? What is meant by the term “vocation”?

Suggested Resources

- Ann Mitsakos Bezzerides. *Christ at Work: Orthodox Christian Perspectives on Vocation*. Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2006.
- St. John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty*. St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1997.
- Fr. George Grube. *What the Church Fathers Say About...* Light and Life, 2005. See especially pp. 131–46.

Senior Division Topic 4

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, in his recent book *Encountering the Mystery*, writes, “[t]he freedom of God determines and defines the freedom of humanity” (p. 126). In what sense does the freedom of God determine and define the freedom of humanity, and what are the practical consequences of this connection?

Some directions your speech could take:

- How does the Patriarch’s statement fit with the American ideal of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,” from the Declaration of Independence?
- What are the differences between free will and determinism?

Suggested Resources

- Metropolitan Kallistos (Ware). *The Orthodox Way*. St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1995. See especially chapter 3, “God as Creator.”
- Fr. Stanley Harakas. *Orthodox Christian Beliefs: Real Answers to Real Questions from Real People*. Light and Life, 2002. See pp. 154–57.
- Fr. George Nicozisin. *The Orthodox Church: A Well-Kept Secret*. See chapter 22, “The Reformation Continues,” pp. 109–114.

Senior Division Topic 5

“I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in His word I put my hope”
(Psalm 130:5, LXX). In light of the entire text of Psalm 130, what is hope and for what do Christians hope?

Some directions your speech could take:

- All people have hope. In which experiences is hope most important to you? How can we avoid trivializing hope, like when we hope that our favorite team wins a championship?
- Explore Psalm 130 verse by verse. How has this poem been understood by its readers over the centuries? How is this beautiful Psalm used in the life of the Orthodox Church? How might it inspire Christians today?

Suggested Resources

- James L. Mays. *Psalms. Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. Westminster John Knox Press, 1994. See especially pp. 405–407.
- Artur Weiser. *The Psalms: A Commentary*. The Old Testament Library. Westminster John Knox Press, 2000.
- Evie Zachariades Holmberg. *Service of Vespers (Interlinear)*. Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1999. See especially p. 14.