

CHALLENGE

THE PULSE OF ORTHODOX YOUTH

Keeping Hope Alive in Our Hearts

by Eva Kokinos

What do we hope for in our everyday lives? We might find ourselves hoping for riches. Sometimes, we hope to find a great parking spot in front of the mall or that there is no wait at our favorite restaurant. Hope does exist in our vocabulary. But, in today's society, it is a word that we do not speak of much anymore.

Unfortunately, many things challenge our belief in hope... our faith... our strength. We are living in times where marriages are failing at an astounding rate and the hope of true love fades away. We live in times where people are struggling to keep their jobs and the hope of prosperity fades away and where young people commit suicide because of the bullying and pressure of the world.

So, the hope of the future begins to fade away.

To most, hope is like a game of chance; rolling the dice, wishing on a shooting star, or leaving it up to fate.

As Orthodox Christians, hope is much more than a feeling and much more than a desire for an unsure outcome.

It is a deeply-rooted belief and trust in the grace of God and His ability to lift us up above adversity and challenges to that which is good. More specifically, Orthodox Christians have hope in Christ's glorious Resurrection and what comes with it... freedom from the bondage of sin and death.

We are blessed with many messages of hope from the Holy Gospels. For example, in Luke 7:11-16, we read that Jesus travels to a city and encounters the burial of a young man.

Seeing the widowed mother of the young man and her sadness, He eased her pain. Jesus Christ touches the young man's funeral bier or coffin, bringing the young man back from death. It is a profound example of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ conquering death by His awesome power. This story is one of three resurrections that our Lord performed, foreshadowing His own Resurrection and offering us proof of the hope that is to come.

In fact, the Holy Scriptures are filled with examples of how we should keep hope alive in our hearts and in our minds. For without hope and faith, would the Prodigal Son have truly gone back to ask for his father's forgiveness after all that he had done? Without hope, would the woman who was ill for many years have even bothered to fight the crowds and reach out to touch the hem of Christ's robe if she didn't believe He was the Son of God?

Ultimately, we must always preach that Christ is that hope. If we truly believe that Jesus Christ came to save sinners, we must proclaim this from our lips. Because Christ is our hope, He reaches each one of us He did for Adam and Eve in the Resurrection icon and lifts us out of the depths of darkness and sin.

It is that hope in Christ that compelled the saints of our history... healers, martyrs, teachers. That same hope will compel the saints of our future to go beyond what is thought to be possible and attain holiness... even at the cost of their lives.

It is that hope in Christ that we must offer to all people so that they might see the light beyond the bullying or other struggles.

They can take comfort in the love and

support from us rather than feel alone with no alternative but to end their life.

And it is that hope in Christ that ties each of us together in the sacramental life of the Church. We stand in hope proclaiming the Creed of our faith, we are kneel in hope and prayer during the Consecration, and we receive His most precious body and blood... which is proof itself of Christ's own hope and faith in God's will.

There is a beautiful and simple prayer to the Holy Trinity that we should put everywhere we look. It offers us a reminder to keep that hope in our hearts, regardless of the challenges and struggles thrown our way. *The Father is my hope; the Son is my refuge; the Holy Spirit is my protector. O All-holy Trinity, glory to you.*

The Father is my hope... creating me in His image that I may grow closer to Him and join him in eternal life. The Son is my refuge... a refuge that I turn to when the world scatters me away and I have nowhere to go.

The Holy Spirit is my protector... because when the enemy is at my heels wanting my life and my soul, the Holy Spirit fills me and gives me strength to travel on.

May Christ our true God continue to touch our souls as He touched the coffin of the young man to revive our hope and faith in Him... bringing us out of death to sin and lifting us up into life eternal.

Eva Kokinos serves as the director of Youth and Young Adult Ministries of the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Detroit. She received a Masters of Theological Studies from Holy Cross School of Theology in 2003.

FOR PARENTS AND YOUTH WORKERS

• Don't forget to sign up for the YOUTH WORKER PULSE! This is the weekly listserve of the Department of Youth and Young Adult Ministries. Subscribers will receive valuable tips, tools, and resources for creating a successful and transformative youth ministry experience. Sign up today at www.youth.goarch.org.

• Looking for a place to find helpful articles, sessions, and links to other youth ministry resources? Look no further than THE WELLSRING! For more information, visit us today at www.youthworker.goarch.org!

• Are you on FACEBOOK? If you are a member of Facebook, you can visit us on our GOYA and Young Adult Ministries fan pages! Just search for GOYA - Greek Orthodox Youth of America or Greek Orthodox National Young Adult Ministries and BECOME A FAN TODAY!

2013 ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN CAMP & YOUTH WORKER CONFERENCE
Endorsed by the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of North and Central America

The 11th Annual Orthodox Christian Camp & Youth Worker Conference provides an arena for Orthodox youth workers from different jurisdictions to share and provide resources. The conference will include keynote and guest speakers, educational presentations, breakout sessions and fellowship. All Orthodox parish and diocese youth workers, camp directors and staff, and OCF chaplains are invited to attend.

Save the Date!
January 24-26, 2013 Austin, TX
Events will be held at the Transfiguration Greek Orthodox Church.

Shine Forth
Helping our Orthodox youth follow and represent Christ.

Arise, shine!
For your light has come! And the glory of the Lord is risen upon you!

More Details to Follow, including accommodations, fees, and a detailed schedule of events.

SAVE THE DATE

2013 Orthodox Christian Camp, Youth Worker, and OCF Chaplain Conference January 24-26, 2013

"Arise, shine: For your light has come! And the glory of the Lord is risen upon you." Isaiah 60:1

Mark your calendars for this annual event!! The 11th annual Orthodox Christian Camp & Youth Worker Conference provides an arena for Orthodox youth workers from different jurisdictions to share and provide resources. This year's conference theme is "Shine Forth: Helping our Orthodox follow and represent Christ."

This conference is being hosted by the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America and will be held Jan. 24-26, 2013 at Transfiguration Greek Orthodox Church in Austin, Texas.

The conference will include keynote and guest speakers, educational presentations, breakout sessions and fellowship. All Orthodox parish and Metropolis youth workers, camp directors and staff, and OCF chaplains are invited to attend.

Details regarding fees, accommodations, and the schedule of events will be coming soon. For the most up-to-date information, visit the Department of Youth and Young Adult Ministries website (www.youth.goarch.org) or the Orthodox Christian Camp Association website (www.orthodoxcamps.org)

"LET US LOVE ONE ANOTHER.."

Treating ALL People with Love and Respect

"Jesus said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.'" - Matthew 22:37-40

Last month, a young woman in West Branch, Mich., was the victim of a cruel prank in preparation for her high school's homecoming. Whitney Kropp, 16-year-old sophomore at Ogemaw Heights High School, thought it was odd that she had been chosen to run for homecoming queen. She was surprised by the nomination since she admits that she was not really part of the cool crowd that gets selected for these types of things.

But soon she noticed that students would pass her in the halls of her high school and laugh. In fact, the teasing and bullying even extended to Facebook. She discovered that it is all a cruel joke to humiliate her. In an article on www.nbcnews.com, this left her feeling like she "wasn't worthy." Thankfully, people in her community and beyond stood up to speak out against this horrible prank and to turn it into a posi-



tive experience. But stories like this do not always end on a positive note.

In fact, this is just one of many stories out there that illustrates how cruel we can be to one another in school, at work, at home, etc. That's all we seem to see on television, in the movies, or on the news. Cruelty seems to have become the "norm." We are used to seeing violence, crime, movies about "mean girls," feuding "Housewives," or kids picking on their own school bus driver.

As Orthodox Christians, how can we make a change in the status quo? How can we begin to turn things around so that

love and respect are the "norm" instead of cruelty and violence? Here are three simple ways you can help inspire this change:

Simply think before you speak and act: It is difficult to not react, especially when you are angry. But take a moment to think about the consequences of your words and actions. How would you honestly feel if you were on the receiving end of cruel words or a mean-spirited prank?

Stand up and speak out against mean words or actions: Don't just pass by and ignore this type of behavior. Stand up for what's right. If you know someone is planning a prank like in the story, report it to someone in charge. Take a moment to think if the tables were turned. Wouldn't you want someone to speak up if they knew you were being bullied or pranked?

Just be kind! - Sounds pretty basic, right? But even smile or a "hello" can have a great impact on someone's day. If everyone took a moment to do at least one kind thing a day, those who do cruel or mean things would be the "odd" ones!

Take a moment to consider the alternative. Doesn't it make you feel good when someone helps you out or says something nice to you?