



ST JOHN CHRYSOSTOM ORATORICAL FESTIVAL

2022 Topic Tips

Junior Division (Grades 7-9)

Topic 1

Share what you learned about yourself after a “technology fast” of at least 21 days. What can we learn about our relationship to God and the world by fasting?

1. Research and read some Orthodox perspectives:

[The Meaning of Fasting in the Orthodox Church](#) by Fr. Milan Savich

[Why do we fast?](#) by Theo Nikolakis

[The True Meaning of Fasting](#) by Philip Kariatlis

2. Consider the direction your speech might take. Here are some ideas to get you started.

Read about why Orthodox Christians fast. Consider why it’s important to consider fasting from more than just food.

What are other actions we can take to further enhance the spiritual benefits of fasting?

Consider how taking time away from technology changed your outlook on the world.

3. Once you have chosen a direction, learn more about the topic. Here are some additional resources:

[Fasting from Technology: A Lenten discipline and much harder than giving up cheeseburgers](#) by Fr. Tony Vrame

[Be the Bee: Three Reasons to Fast from Social Media](#) by Steven Christoforou

Topic 2

In our personal prayer and liturgy, we usually make requests of God. Discuss why we make these petitions and how God fulfills them.

1. Research and read some Orthodox perspectives:

Beginning to Pray by Anthony Bloom.

A Beginner's Guide to Prayer: The Orthodox Way to Grow Closer to God by Michael Keiser.

2. Consider the direction your speech might take. Here are some ideas to get you started.

Consider how we should pray and why we should continue to pray -- even when it may seem that our prayers go unanswered.

Read the petitions in the Divine Liturgy. Talk about the importance of the various requests we make and why we make them. Consider how and why the Greek Orthodox Church in America added a petition about COVID to the list of petitions the community has been saying for over 1000 years.

Consider the difference between community prayer and individual prayer. Are both equally important? What's the unique value of each?

3. Once you have chosen a direction, learn more about the topic. Here are some additional resources:

[Trusting the gifts of unanswered prayers](#) by Edna King

[Learning to never expect an answer to our prayers](#) by Fr. Gabriel Bilas

Topic 3

Choose a saint whose life has been important to you or your family. Discuss what you find most inspiring about this saint and what others can learn from how they lived their life.

1. Research and read some Orthodox perspectives:

[The Saints of the Orthodox Church](#) published by the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America.

Orthodox Saints by Fr. George Poulos (published in 4 volumes)

2. Consider the direction your speech might take. Here are some ideas to get you started.

In our Orthodox tradition, some saints are commonly called upon by people suffering with certain ailments or are special to a particular part of Greece. Research and talk about a saint that is particularly important to a community or need that is meaningful to you. Be sure to demonstrate in your speech that you have conducted research.

Research the saint that your home parish is named after. Find out why that saint was selected by the founders of the Church. Read about their life and research how the saint has impacted people in your community and in other communities.

3. Once you have chosen a direction, learn more about the topic. Here are some additional resources:

[Praying to the Saints](#) published by St. Barbara Church in Orange, Connecticut - includes a list of Saints who are often venerated for certain ailments or concerns.

[Lives of the Saints](#) published by the Orthodox Church in America. - includes some basic information about many saints in a searchable directory. You will need to do deeper research once you have selected the saint you want to focus on.

Topic 4

Discuss how you would share your Orthodox Christian faith with a visitor to your parish.

1. Research and read some Orthodox perspectives:

The Orthodox Church by Metropolitan Kallistos Ware

Introducing the Orthodox Church: Its Faith and Life by Anthony M. Coniaris

Know the Faith: A Handbook for Orthodox Christians and Inquirers by Michael Shanbour

2. Consider the direction your speech might take. Here are some ideas to get you started.

Study the Nicene Creed which outlines what we as Orthodox Christians believe. Consider how to explain what we believe about God to your friends.

Consider and discuss some of the ways that we actively participate in church throughout our lives -- through our baptisms and chrismations, through active participation in the Liturgy on Sundays, through the act of confession, through the sacrament of marriage, by praying for and remembering those who have fallen asleep in the Lord, and more.

Attend a service at a non-Orthodox Christian church. Then think about what makes our Church and our Liturgies different -- for example, the iconography, the hymns and prayers, the importance of the Theotokos in our worship, the way all of our senses are engaged -- and research why these things are significant.

3. Once you have chosen a direction, learn more about the topic. Here are some additional resources:

The Nicene Creed for Young People by Anthony M. Coniaris

[Understanding the Sacraments of the Orthodox Church](#) by Rev. Fr. Thomas Fitzgerald

[The Five Senses in Worship](#) by Penelope Antonopoulos

[The Functions of Icons](#) by Dr. Constantine Cavarinos

Topic 5

Discuss your favorite Church service of the year and why it is meaningful to you.

1. Research and read some Orthodox perspectives:

Orthodox Lent, Holy Week and Easter: Liturgical Texts with Commentary by Hugh Wybrew

Holy Week Service Book

[Celebrating the Nativity as a Family](#) published by the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America

2. Consider the direction your speech might take. Here are some ideas to get you started.

Pick your favorite Church holiday and describe your personal experience being part of the celebration. Conduct research (read the hymns and prayers, read the sermons that St. John Chrysostom or other Church Fathers delivered on some of these feast days). Talk about the significance of what we are celebrating on that day.

Consider whether the feast-day of your parish is a particularly special event for your community. Read the hymns and prayers dedicated to the saint that are part of the service and talk both about your personal experiences and your reflections on what you read and researched.

Is your favorite Church service the Liturgy we celebrate every Sunday? Why? Consider how important this service must be, since we have celebrated essentially the same service every week for the past 1000+ years in Orthodox Churches around the world.

3. Once you have chosen a direction, learn more about the topic. Here are some additional resources:

[The Major Feasts of the Orthodox Church](#) published by the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America - Dr. Lewis Patsavos, Ph.D.

[Holy Week](#) published by the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America

[An Explanation of the Holy Week Services](#) by Rev. Demetrios George Kalaris

Be the Bee: [The Wonder of Christmas](#) by Stephen Christoforou

Senior Division (*Grades 10-12*)

Topic 1

Discuss the significance of Orthodox iconography (historically, symbolically and/or artistically) and how icons enhance our worship.

1. Research and read some Orthodox perspectives:

[Venerating Icons](#) by Steven Christoforou

[Icons \(PRAXIS Magazine 11.1\)](#)

[No Graven Image: Icons and Their Proper Use](#) by Fr. Jack N. Sparks

2. Consider the direction your speech might take. Here are some ideas to get you started.

Consider how we should incorporate icons in our personal prayer life, as we do in our community prayer life (e.g., in Church). Consider the difference between treating icons as decoration and as a window into the spiritual world of Christ and the Saints who are with us.

Consider the Old Testament prohibitions concerning graven images (e.g. Exodus 20) and why our Church still allows for icons and their veneration.

Consider how icons connect us to the very reality they represent, and how our veneration of them becomes our veneration of their prototypes (e.g. Christ, the Panaghia, and the Saints). Consider how they make themselves present to us in the icons.

3. Once you have chosen a direction, learn more about the topic. Here are some additional resources:

[St John of Damascus - Three Treatises on the Divine Images](#)

The Holy Icons: Doors to the Kingdom, in [The Orthodox Church: An Introduction to its History, Doctrine, and Spiritual Culture](#) by Fr. John McGuckin.

[Orthodox Iconography](#) by Constantine Cavarnos

Topic 2

From the earliest days, Christian worship has been community-based, not only solitary, and Christians formed communities where the members learned from and took care of one another. Why is it important to be part of a Church community, and how is this relevant today?

1. Research and read some Orthodox perspectives:

[Heaven on Earth: The Divine Liturgy](#) by Tom Papagiannis

[Why Church Matters](#) by Steven Christoforou

[Of Your Mystical Supper](#) by Michael Haldas

2. Consider the direction your speech might take. Here are some ideas to get you started.

Consider the expressions (e.g., the Eucharist and the other sacraments, the services, etc.) and characteristics (prayer, teachings, ceremonies, gestures, processions, etc.) of community prayer and explain why they are beneficial.

Discuss how God speaks to us in the Liturgy and how we respond; how He gives Himself to us in the Eucharist, and what that effects in us as the Body of Christ. Consider how that is different from personal, individual prayer.

Consider ways in which we, as the Church, fulfill the prayer (in the Liturgy of St John Chrysostom) that we may “commit ourselves and one another and our whole life to Christ our God.” Consider how being part of a Church community provides opportunities to serve God through your actions.

3. Once you have chosen a direction, learn more about the topic. Here are some additional resources:

[Orthodox Worship: A Living Continuity with the Synagogue, the Temple, and the Early Church](#) by Benjamin Williams & Harold Anstall

Faith and Worship in [The Orthodox Church: An Introduction to Eastern Christianity](#) by Met. Kallistos Ware

[Introducing the Orthodox Church: Its Faith And Life](#) by Anthony M. Coniaris

Topic 3

The Orthodox faithful pray to the saints for physical healing and we have examples of saints like Cosmas and Damian who were doctors. What does this teach us about the Orthodox perspective on faith, health, and medicine?

1. Research and read some Orthodox perspectives:

[Doctors and Medicine](#) by Fr. Thomas Hopko

[For the Health of Body and Soul: An Eastern Orthodox Introduction to Bioethics](#) by Rev. Dr. Stanley S. Harakas

[COVID and the Vaccines](#), interview with Dr. Ryan Sampson Nash, MD, MA

Inspirational text: [Book of Sirach 38:1-23](#)

2. Consider the direction your speech might take. Here are some ideas to get you started.

Discuss the contemporary debates within Orthodoxy regarding the use of vaccines during the Covid-19 pandemic. What has the Church, through our hierarchs, affirmed, and what is the theological and anthropological basis for it?

Consider how prayer and faith cooperate with medical science for healing.

Consider some of the bioethical challenges of modern healthcare and how our faith might teach us to navigate difficult questions.

3. Once you have chosen a direction, learn more about the topic. Here are some additional resources:

[Health and Medicine in the Eastern Orthodox Tradition: Faith Liturgy and Wholeness](#) by Rev. Dr. Stanley S. Harakas

[Stages on Life's Way: Orthodox Thinking on Bioethics](#) by Fr. John Breck

[Statement Regarding Developments in Medicine: COVID-19 Vaccines & Immunizations](#)

Topic 4

Discuss ways that a young person can respond to God's call to love God with heart, soul, mind, and strength and one's neighbor as oneself (see Luke 10:27).

1. Research and read some Orthodox perspectives:

[Does God Have a Plan for You?](#) by Steven Christoforou

[Finding One's Vocation in Life](#) by Fr. Thomas Hopko

[Vocations Are Gifts from God](#) by His Grace Bishop John

2. Consider the direction your speech might take. Here are some ideas to get you started.

Discuss what is the meaning of Jesus' words, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind" and "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." How does that apply to different callings in life?

Consider how a calling to serve God in ecclesiastical ministry (ordained or lay ministry) and a calling to secular professions can both equally fulfill the commandment to love the Lord and neighbor, considering one's personal path; and what would either path require for the fulfillment of the commandment?

Consider the relationship between God's calling and one's gifts, abilities and desires. How do they intersect? How does one discern God's calling? How does our free will interact with God's love and calling for us?

3. Once you have chosen a direction, learn more about the topic. Here are some additional resources:

[Christ At Work: Orthodox Christian Perspectives on Vocation](#) by Ann Mitsakos Bezzerides

[Eastern Orthodox Christianity and American Higher Education: Theological, Historical, and Contemporary Reflections](#) by Ann Mitsakos Bezzerides

[Eastern Orthodoxy and Christian Vocation](#) by Ann Mitsakos Bezzerides

Topic 5

In every Church service, we pray for “peace in the world,” usually many times. Yet, war and violence persist. What is the Orthodox Christian approach to war and violence?

1. Research and read some Orthodox perspectives:

Explore the sections on War and Violence in the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese document [Toward a Social Ethos of the Orthodox Church](#)

[Orthodox Perspectives on Peace, War, and Violence](#) by Rev. Dr. Philip LeMasters

[War and Non-Violence](#)

[Peace and War in the Eastern Orthodox Church](#)

2. Consider the direction your speech might take. Here are some ideas to get you started.

Consider the meaning of “peace” in the Scriptures (*shalom* and *irini*), and whether it refers simply to the absence of warfare and conflict, or rather to an active state of harmony and well-being that applies to all relations, and especially of God and man. How does that inform personal and societal relations?

Consider how war, as the antithesis of peace, exists in fallen human existence, requiring a Christian response in different contexts. For example, could a Christian empire defend itself and ask God for victory in war against the “adversaries of the faith?” Or, in modern times, is an Orthodox Christian free to participate in war as a combatant in the Armed Forces?

Discuss how these considerations apply to an individual. May an Orthodox Christian use force to defend one’s integrity or one’s family or loved ones? Conversely, should a Orthodox Christian be a strict pacifist in personal matters? And if so, is he or she still free to be a soldier or a peace officer? What has the Church taught with respect to Christian ethics in these matters, in the private and public levels?

3. Once you have chosen a direction, learn more about the topic. Here are some additional resources:

[Orthodox Christian Perspectives on War and Violence](#) edited by Perry Hamalis and Valerie Karras.

[In Communion - Orthodox Peace Fellowship](#) - War and Peace resources

[Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation: Insights From Orthodoxy](#) by Gennadios Limouris

