



WEEK ELEVEN

SPF: Say Prayers Frequently

As the month of July expires, our attention turns to the two-week fasting period (August 1–14) preceding the final great feast day of the ecclesiastical year, the Dormition of the Theotokos (August 15). At this time, it is customary for Orthodox Christian communities to gather and alternately pray the small and great Paraklesis (supplication) services to the Theotokos on most evenings during the fast.

Asking for the prayers of the Theotokos is a pious and ancient practice of Orthodox Christians. As the one “with motherly favor,” the Theotokos fervently intercedes on our behalf before God’s throne. She is our heavenly Mother as well! Don’t forget to write down and submit the names of family and friends so that your priest may pray for their well-being during the Paraklesis services.

To access the Small Paraklesis service online, visit <https://www.goarch.org/-/the-service-of-the-small-paraklesis-intercessory-prayer-to-the-most-holy-theotokos>.

Dive In: IOCC Emergency Kits

Help Save Lives with Emergency Supplies!

IOCC emergency kits are small packages of essential supplies assembled in the United States and shipped to people in need around the world. Imagine being so poor that soap, washcloths, and school supplies are considered luxury items. Many parishes, youth groups, and individuals want to do something tangible to help others. Assembling and sending emergency kits is a practical way to make life a bit better for someone in need.

TYPES OF KITS

1. *Health/Hygiene Kits*—Curb the spread of disease by donating basic hygiene items.
2. *School Kits*—Give a child the tools needed to succeed at school.
3. *Clean-up Buckets*—Help people clean up after a natural disaster.

Visit <https://www.iocc.org/take-action/assemble-emergency-kits> for specific information on packing and shipping each kit.

Do them as a family, or get a group together and do more!

International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC), in the spirit of Christ's love, offers emergency relief and development programs to those in need worldwide, without discrimination, and strengthens the capacity of the Orthodox Church to respond. For more information about them and how you can get involved, visit www.iocc.org.

Take pictures, and don't forget to share with us!
#soakuptheSON

Vitamin D: Raising Paracletes

Teaching Our Children to be Compassionate Kathryn Bocanegra

Orthodox Christians are called to live compassionately through committing daily to acts of mercy. However, the thought of “almsgiving” has become a seasonal consideration (Christmas, Lent) rather than a lifestyle. How can a family make acts of compassion a part of their spiritual life?

Several years ago I sat in on a parish meeting in which the possibility of opening a soup kitchen was discussed. A concerned mother voiced her anxiety over having “those kinds of people” become familiar with the church, and in turn show up at times when children were at the parish school. There was marked discomfort over the idea of “those kinds of people” coming into contact with parish children. As parents who want the best for our children, who want to protect them from harm and the dangers of the world, in truth how many of us share the sentiments of this concerned mother?

I have vivid memories from when I was in elementary school and my mother would prepare a Nativity meal for the janitorial staff of my public school. She would come in with trays of rich food for the janitors, who would stare in disbelief at the delicious spread before them, surprised that somebody acknowledged them as human beings who also celebrated the Nativity of Christ. When I asked my mother, “Why didn’t you prepare a meal for my teachers?” she replied, “Because nobody remembers the janitors, who make this a safe and clean place for you.” By the time I was in fourth grade, my mother started getting me and my siblings involved in volunteer activities. To this day she still volunteers at a foster home with mostly African-American youth who grew up in broken homes.

What did my mother instill in me and my siblings from an early age? That “those kinds of people” are also made in the image of Christ and are worthy of our hearts. My mother’s example echoes the words of St. John Chrysostom, who wrote, “It is not a small thing for even one sheep to be saved, since the shepherd left the ninety-nine sheep and ran after the one which had strayed. I do not despise anyone; even if he is only one, **he is a human being, the living creature for which God cares**” (*On Wealth and Poverty*, translated by Catharine P. Roth, pp. 99–100). My mother embodied the Gospel reading shared on the Sunday of the Last Judgment, in which Christ tells us, “Inasmuch as you did it to one of the *least of these My brethren, you did it to Me*” (Matthew 25:40).

Often, out of the desire to protect our children and instill morals in them (the difference between "right" and "wrong"), we end up making them more punitive than Christian. We encourage them to capitalize on differences rather than seek out similarities. When they tell us about a friend who got in trouble or that friend's concerning behavior, we tell them, "He's a bad boy; you should stay away from him," rather than processing the roots of this individual's behaviors and teaching our children compassion. We should form our children to be **Paracletes**, a word that is used for the Holy Spirit in the Gospels (John 14:16; John 14:26; John 15:26; John 16:7). A Paraclete is a comforter, an advocate, and a helper. "**Sympathy corrects the difference, and love makes all even**" (St. John Chrysostom, *On Wealth and Poverty*, p. 105).

Although my mother probably never wanted me to work in violence prevention in one of the cities with the highest homicide rates and prison populations, I attribute my work to her compassionate heart. Children desire a sense of purpose in life, the feeling that they are "making a difference." My parents were stewards of my gifts and talents; they were charged with the sacred responsibility of nurturing them so that in turn I could be an offering of thanksgiving: "Thine own of Thine own we offer unto Thee" (Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom). Parents are given the opportunity to be the greatest influence in drawing forth God's gifts in their children, but they can also be the biggest obstacle toward their children's self-actualization and the realization of God's will for them. Unfortunately, some parents find it more important to see the realization of their own dreams rather than what is in their child's best interest.

Raising compassionate children will in turn lead them closer to God. The desert father Abba Dorotheos was once approached by a monk who was disgruntled by the behavior of a fellow monk. Abba Dorotheos drew a wheel with many spokes. He explained that the wheel represented their monastic community, with the center of the wheel being Christ. Each spoke represented a member of the community. Observing this wheel, Abba Dorotheos pointed out that at the periphery of the wheel (further away from the Christ-center), the spokes were widely spaced out. The closer you move to the Christ-center, the closer the spokes grow together. If we raise children to "live generously," in the words of my spiritual father, we in turn lead them closer to Christ.

There are many ways families can incorporate almsgiving into their daily life. First and foremost, be an example of a generous and compassionate person. Watch your comments about minority/ethnic groups, how you express your anger, and how you process misfortune or tragedy. Your disposition toward people who are different from you will lay a blueprint for your children. A good exercise is to watch the five o'clock news with children who are of an appropriate age (ten years and older) and help them process the crises that are reported. Do this in a compassionate way, not a punitive way. Second, incorporate prayers **for those who are not remembered** into your family's prayer life. Discuss with your children the question "Who are people who are normally forgotten?" Examples include the mentally ill, prisoners, soldiers, and the institutionalized. When your children enter a church, you can encourage them to light a candle for those who are not remembered as well, explaining that God knows who these people are.

Read the lives of the saints, like those of St. Moses the Ethiopian, St. Photini (the Samaritan woman), St. Mary of Egypt, St. Thais, St. Mary Magdalene, Dismas (the thief on the cross), St. Paul (once the persecutor of Christians), and King David the Psalmist to your children. Their lives are powerful testimonies of authentic repentance and redemption. Share stories like these with your children, like the one about St. Pachomios the Great, a desert father, who once learned of a famine ravaging the city of Alexandria. He wept for several days and refused to eat any food. When begged to eat, St. Pachomios replied, "How can I eat when my brethren do not have bread?" Participating in regular volunteer work is a spiritually beneficial activity for children. It is not harmful to expose them to poverty; rather, it will make them more thankful for what they have.

Before a priest communes at the Liturgy, he prays that the Lord will, with His own hand, grant a share in His Holy Body and Blood to those in the altar and "through us to all [God's] people." May God encourage parents to teach their children the benefit of putting a higher value on others than they do on themselves, so that *Christ can give Himself to ALL people* through these children. May they become **Paracletes** for the weak and disenfranchised they encounter, and as a result develop a warm and compassionate heart. "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interest of others" (Philippians 2:3-4).

Kathryn Bocanegra is a resident of Chicago and is a licensed clinical social worker in the field of violence prevention. Kathryn works with at-risk youth and organizes community-level strategies to enhance public safety. She currently facilitates a support group for parents who've lost children to violence as well as community watch programs. Through her work she has started a reentry program for men who have recently come home from prison, and her dream is to build a recovery home for urban youth. She has worked with IOCC in Ethiopia and the OCMC in Albania.

