

Living The Faith

We would like to teach our children the meaning of the Divine Liturgy. But we cannot thoroughly explain to them something they must EXPERIENCE! How can we explain the hymns and prayers if they were not there present to hear them in person? It's like building a house without a foundation. The children stroll in at various times, usually after the Holy Gospel. If you ever speak to a Catholic friend about that, they will tell you that you have missed the Liturgy if you don't hear the Word of God through the Holy Gospel. The children don't drive themselves, so I cannot blame them for being late. It is so frustrating to desire to teach these precious children the Truth of God's Revelation found in Orthodoxy, only to find a lack of cooperation from some parents. How can parents, be so complacent - if not irresponsible?

The children do not learn the Faith by assimilation or through heredity. They learn from their honest appraisal of our daily struggle to walk in the Light of Christ. They learn through your and my living examples, which encompasses all our human virtues, achievements, weaknesses, failures and mistakes. They learn by attending Church Services, receiving Holy Communion and worshipping as a family in Christ. They learn by their own personal daily prayers to God and their own personal struggle to be good Orthodox Christians.

I struggled, studied, searched and agonized in seeking the One True Church of Jesus Christ. After so many long years of study I feel that I know so little, yet I do know that Orthodoxy is the Revealed Truth of Almighty God. And yet, I often wonder if you – as an Orthodox Christian - really realize what you have, and what you are. Do you take this all for granted? Is this just some Ethnic, Social, Fraternal organization where we share a common history? Or could it be the dynamic living presence of Almighty God, residing in us, occupying a place in our hearts and enfolding us all as One Family know as the Church – The Body of Christ?

What is the purpose of the Church? Is it to bring us together for social events...or to prepare us to celebrate eternally, together, in the Kingdom of God? The erroneous secular view sees a very limited scope of purpose for the Church - it is there to serve whatever needs we deem fit to fulfill our ego needs, our social recognition and advancement. The correct view sees the Church as the Spiritual Body of Christ, where the faithful gather together to worship God in Trinity, and thereby receive Grace, which strengthens, enlivens and inspires the soul on its way to eternal union with God.

When one lights a match the flame brightens the room, providing momentary warmth, light and even assistance in lighting another item. If you hold it too long it burns your fingers. So the fleeting praise of men uplifts our egos, making us feel good, but the light fades rather quickly and we have to seek new ways to impress or convince others of our importance. The book of Ecclesiastes expressed it best; "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." (It is very interesting to read the short 12 chapters of this Old Testament Book to receive great wisdom.)

Grace is to the soul what food is to the body. God nourishes us spiritually through His Divine Grace, in Holy Communion, in Worship, in Prayer, in Good Deeds, in Fasting, in Vigilance, in living an Orthodox Christian Life. Our Lord Jesus Christ gave us a vivid answer in the Gospel of St. Luke when he spoke to Martha telling her, “you are anxious and troubled about many things; one thing is needful.” In other words, God, the Father, is telling us, “My children, there is one thing you must do - listen to Christ, My Word, hear Him so that you may better serve Him and find salvation!”

My hope is that the paragraphs above made you think about your relationship with God. Your soul is so precious to God. It cries out within you to be reunited with its Creator - to find salvation in Christ. That is why we are here. We don't want you to awaken from death and say, “Hey, why didn't my Priest tell me, or at least try to warn me about this?” Now, you have been told. The responsibility is your own! Your Pastor will be most pleased to find ways that can help you to grow in the love and Faith of Almighty God. Come to Confession. Seek your Priest's counsel, and he will do all he can to assist you. May God bless and guide us all to His salvation!

In Christ's love,
+Fr Al