



St. John Chrysostom Oratorical Festival 2021

Topics, Tips and Resources



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Topics, Tips and Resources

Elementary Division (Grades 4–6)

The purpose of the Elementary Division is to offer children the opportunity to express their feelings about their Faith and Church while gaining confidence and self-esteem. In addition, it provides an incentive to children for later participation in the Junior and Senior Divisions.

Basic differences between the Elementary and the Junior/Senior Divisions:

- The Elementary Division is strictly a local program.
- There is no judging.
- The topics are modest but invite creativity: Jesus, prayer, icons, etc.
- It is designed to fit easily into the Church school program with flexible topics that coincide with the curriculum.
- To make it even more interesting, consider having some classes sing a song or reenact a parable or a Bible story. Be creative!

What are the rules?

- Encourage all children to participate. Teachers and parents should assist the children in choosing a topic. Invite the children to present their talks at a community gathering, perhaps after the Divine Liturgy, as part of a parish event, during a special Oratorical program or as part of the Junior and Senior Oratorical Festival.
- Each talk should last 30–90 seconds. However, strict timing should not be observed. For instance, one child may offer only two or three sentences, and another may offer considerably more. Also, if a child feels more comfortable using an icon, picture or poster as part of the talk, this is permissible.

Suggested topics:

Jesus Christ	Helping Others	A Smile	The Bible
Love	The Cross	My Church	My Family
Being Kind	Prayer	Church School	My Favorite Icon
Lighting a Candle			

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Junior Division (Grades 7–9)

1. Discuss the challenges and opportunities of watching a church service that is live streamed.

A. Research and read some Orthodox perspectives:

- Message from Patriarch Bartholomew Regarding COVID-19
<https://ocf.org/message-of-his-all-holiness-ecumenical-patriarch-bartholomew-regarding-covid-19/>
- **Public Orthodoxy, Fasting from Communion During a Pandemic**
<https://publicorthodoxy.org/2020/03/17/fasting-from-communion-in-a-pandemic/>
- Be the Bee #139, Christianity Under Quarantine
<https://www.goarch.org/-/be-the-bee-139-christianity-under-quarantine>

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

- Consider how it felt to “dial in” remotely to church services. Were you able to maintain prayerful focus as easily? How did it feel to not have the opportunity to receive Communion and to see the churches empty of parishioners? Did your family do anything to create a more church-like environment in which to watch services? Why was this important?
- During the pandemic, some families dialed in to watch different church services. It was possible, without leaving your house, to participate in services from other cities, states, countries and even other Orthodox jurisdictions. If you dialed in to different services, what did you learn from this experience? Did it help you feel connected to a broader Orthodox community?
- Some churches began live-streaming their services more than ten years ago – as a way to enable elderly people or others unable to come to church. During the pandemic many more churches began broadcasting their services. Consider how much more disconnected we all would have felt if we were not able to leverage technology to broadcast the services. Do you expect more churches will continue the practice of broadcasting services after the COVID-19 pandemic is past? Why or why not? Do you fear that this has opened a slippery slope that has opened the door to less frequent Church attendance and the loss of community?

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C. Once you have chosen a direction, learn more about the topic. Here are additional resources and readings:

- For data on Orthodox parishes and on-line services, see “The Pandemic and American Orthodox Christian Parishes” - <https://orthodoxreality.org/reports/>
- For data on how many people began to experience on-line services.
<https://www.pewforum.org/2020/08/07/attending-and-watching-religious-services-in-the-age-of-the-coronavirus/>

2. Prayer is called a “conversation with God.” Discuss the meaning of prayer in your life.

A. Research and read some Orthodox perspectives:

- *The Way of a Pilgrim* and *The Pilgrim Continues His Way*
- *Beginning to Pray* by Anthony Bloom (Orthodox Marketplace item #FL500)

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

- Select a prayer that is particularly meaningful to you and explain why.
- Hymns are prayers sung communally or individually. Perhaps your favorite prayer is actually a hymn of the Church.
- There are prayers of adoration (praising God), prayers of contrition (asking for forgiveness), prayers of petition (asking for a favor) and prayers of thanksgiving (showing God gratitude). Explore the different types of prayer and why they are all important. Or choose one type of prayer and explore the role this type of prayer has had in your life.
- Consider the tools that are part of Orthodox tradition – prayer ropes, icons, and incense - - and discuss their role in enhancing prayer.

C. Once you have chosen a direction, learn more about the topic. Here are some recommended resources and readings:

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GOA Youth & Young Adult Ministries, Be the Bee #104, “Is it Possible to Pray Always?” Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9CBZjLUluk&feature=em-subsub_digest

My Orthodox Prayer Book (Department of Religious Education, 1985)
(Orthodox Marketplace Item #FL501)

3. During the pandemic, people noticed that our natural environment became cleaner. What can this teach us about our care for the natural world?

A. Research and read some Orthodox perspectives:

- *On Earth as in Heaven: Ecological Vision and Initiatives of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew* written by Patriarch Bartholomew.
- *Toward an Ecology of Transfiguration: Orthodox Christian Perspectives on Environment, Nature and Creation*, edited by Fr. John Chryssavgis and Bruce V. Foltz.

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

- Talk about your personal experiences during the lock-down phase of the pandemic – did a slower pace with less scheduled activities lead you to experience and appreciate nature more? Did this bring you closer to God in any way?
- Research the positive impacts of the pandemic shut-downs on water and air quality, depletion of natural resources, etc. What lessons should we as Orthodox Christians take from this?
- There were also of course negative impacts of the shut-down in terms of businesses closing and many jobs being lost. How do we balance our responsibility for taking care of the environment with the realities of a global economy?

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C. Once you have chosen a direction, learn more about the topic. Here are some recommended resources and readings:

- *Greening the Orthodox Parish: A Handbook for Christian Ecological Practice*
- Orthodoxy and the Environment, Ancient Faith podcast hosted by Kevin Allen featuring Fr. Michael Butler
https://www.ancientfaith.com/podcasts/aftoday/orthodoxy_and_the_environment

4. Why is the church still relevant, especially for young people, in our increasingly secular, post-COVID world?

A. Research and read some Orthodox perspectives:

- Be the Bee episode #94 - Why Church Matters by Steven Christoforou
- Be the Bee episode #82 - Does the Liturgy Need You by Steven Christoforou
- *Fundamentalism or Tradition: Christianity after Secularism* volume of essays edited by Aristotle Papanikolaou and George E Demacopoulos

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

- Discuss the challenges of being a faithful Orthodox Christian in a secular society and talk about how you cope with these challenges. Give examples from your life. Talk about how God and the church have helped you.
- Are there role models in your life – family members, clergy or community leaders, Saints of the church – who have taught you what it means to be a good Orthodox Christian in a secular society. Choose someone who has influenced your life and talk about that.
- How has COVID changed our society? Have these changes made it more difficult to live your faith? Why is it important to persevere?

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C. Once you have chosen a direction, learn more about the topic. Here are some recommended resources and readings:

- Orthodox Christianity in the 21st Century by the Pew Research Center
<https://www.pewforum.org/2017/11/08/orthodox-christianity-in-the-21st-century/>
- US teens take after their parents religiously, attend services together and enjoy family rituals, Pew Research.
<https://www.pewforum.org/2020/09/10/u-s-teens-take-after-their-parents-religiously-attend-services-together-and-enjoy-family-rituals/>

5. Choose one parable from the Gospel of Luke chapters 15 or 16 that is particularly meaningful to you and explain what we can learn from it.

A. Read the Church's teachings:

- *The Orthodox Study Bible* (Thomas Nelson, 2008) (Orthodox Marketplace item #BIB007)
- *Knowing Christ*, (Department of Religious Education, Orthodox Marketplace item M05-1)
- Theodore Stylianopoulos, *Bread for Life* (Department of Religious Education, Orthodox Marketplace item BIB 440)
- *A Lamp To My Feet* (Department of Religious Education, Orthodox Marketplace item M13)
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B. Consider the direction your speech might take. Here are some ideas to get you started:

- Consider the lesson that Jesus was trying to teach his disciples through the parable. Explain how that lesson is still relevant today.
- Think of a situation in your own life that pertains to this parable and explain what we can learn from the parable.

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C. Once you have chosen a direction, learn more about the topic. Here are some recommended resources and readings:

- St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke* - <https://sites.google.com/site/aquinasstudybible/home/luke-commentary/cyril-of-alexandria-commentary-on-luke>
- *On Wealth and Poverty*: St. John Chrysostom (for the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus)

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Senior Division (Grades 10–12)

1. During the stay at home period of the pandemic, Orthodox Christians had to find ways to practice their faith without attending church in person or participating in parish activities. Discuss what you learned during those days.

A. Read the Church's teachings:

- Message from Patriarch Bartholomew Regarding COVID-19
<https://ocf.org/message-of-his-all-holiness-ecumenical-patriarch-bartholomew-regarding-covid-19/>
- Ancient Faith podcast special: Encouragement During the Coronavirus Pandemic
https://www.ancientfaith.com/specials/encouragement_during_the_coronavirus_pandemic

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

- Think about the things that you missed the most about church and parish life during the stay-at-home period of the pandemic. How did you stay involved with your faith during the pandemic?
- What did you learn from this experience and did it lead to any practices that you plan to continue after the pandemic subsides?
- Did your faith help you during the pandemic by keeping you focused on the needs and struggles of others, rather than what you were personally missing out on?

C. Once you have chosen a direction, learn more about the topic. Here are some recommended resources and readings:

- Disease, community and grief in a COVID-19 world by Susan Holman
<https://publicorthodoxy.org/2020/05/29/disease-community-and-grief-in-a-covid-19-world/>

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- An Orthodox ethos of solidarity against COVID-19 by Dr. Nicholas Kazarian
<https://publicorthodoxy.org/2020/03/28/an-orthodox-ethos-of-solidarity-against-covid-19/>

2. In July 2020, a Turkish court gave permission for Hagia Sophia to be converted from a museum into a mosque. Discuss the significance of Hagia Sophia in the history of Christianity and the power of monuments like it to inspire religious identity.

A. Research and read about historical context and recent events:

- Information about Hagia Sophia
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Hagia-Sophia>
- Information about the conversion from museum to mosque.
<https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/07/1068151>
- Later in the summer, the Chora Monastery, also a museum, was converted to a mosque...
<https://www.dw.com/en/like-hagia-sophia-turkey-to-reconvert-chora-museum-into-mosque/a-54713753>

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

- Is there such a thing as sacred ground? Does it matter if the spaces where Christ or the saints once walked are now in the possession of non-believers?
- Research the persecution of Christians in Turkey and explore how the recent development could be understood as a deliberate provocation. Why do you believe this action was taken at this particular moment in time?
- Explore the history of Hagia Sophia and what it meant to the Byzantine Empire.

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C. Once you have chosen a direction, learn more about the topic. Here are some recommended resources and readings:

- Statements about the conversion from museum to mosque
<https://www.archons.org/>
- Hymn of Entry to the Hagia Sophia by Bishop Athanasius (Yevtich) of Herzegovina
<https://publicorthodoxy.org/2020/07/24/hymn-of-entry-to-the-hagia-sophia/>

3. We live in a highly polarized society – left vs. right, personal liberty vs. common good, and other issues where it seems everything is politicized. How are we as Orthodox Christians called to navigate this environment?.

A. Research and read some Orthodox perspectives:

- *For the Life of the World: The Social Ethos of the Orthodox Church* (Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2020), especially the section, “The Church in the Public Sphere.”
<https://www.goarch.org/social-ethos>
- Ancient Faith podcast by Christian Gonzalez, ‘We’re all in this together’
https://www.ancientfaith.com/specials/encouragement_during_the_coronavirus_pandemic/were_all_in_this_together

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

- We know as Christians that our earthly world is a fallen world. How might our involvement in the concerns of earthly Kingdom distract us from the heavenly Kingdom?
- Jesus regularly speaks about the need to care for the poor, the hungry, and strangers and instructs love our neighbors as ourselves. How should these spiritual principles shape political activity?
- Consider the difference between Christian virtue and political ideology. Is one political ideology a more Christian platform or do Christian virtues transcend political parties?

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- How can Christians work to bridge the political divide?
- Consider the extent to which social media – including paid disinformation spread through social media – can inform our political views and our views of the world at large.

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C. Once you have chosen a direction, learn more about the topic. Here are some recommended resources and readings:

- Be the Bee episode #152, 'How Christians can save politics,' by Steven Christoforou. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eYzRJwh5qX0&list=PLbyQMR-r8bJTrcWpWxSUPdJHdZJsq_zG&index=153

4. St. Peter writes, "Live as free men, yet without using your freedom as a pretext for evil; but live as servants of God." (1 Peter 2:16). What is freedom and how does it become a basis for being a servant?

A. Research and read some Orthodox perspectives:

- *For the Life of the World: The Social Ethos of the Orthodox Church* (Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2020), especially the section, "Orthodoxy and Human Rights." <https://www.goarch.org/social-ethos>

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

- Political freedom is often understood to be about personal political, economic and social freedoms, as described in the Bill of Rights. The freedom made possible by the birth, death and Resurrection of Jesus is different altogether. Consider how.
- There are several parables where Jesus uses the idea of servants to convey a message. What does it mean to be a servant and what can we learn from these teachings?

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- 2021 is the 200th anniversary of Greek Independence from the Ottoman Turks. What’s the connection between spiritual and political freedom?

C. Once you have chosen a direction, learn more about the topic. Here are some recommended resources and readings:

- Be the Bee, episode #47, Free as a bee by Steven Christoforou
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KvHrnSKPOQo>
- Be the Bee, episode #148, Do we act like Christians? by Steven Christoforou
<https://youtu.be/FToCEb57mNQ>
- Freedom is a Double-edged sword by Andrew Williams
https://www.ancientfaith.com/podcasts/freedom/freedom_is_a_double_edged_sword

5. In the Psalms we read, “If you, Lord, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with you.” (Psalm 130:3-4, NRSV). Discuss how an Orthodox Christian understands sin, forgiveness, mercy, and repentance.

A. Research and read some Orthodox perspectives:

- *How to Be a Sinner* by Peter Bouteneff (Orthodox Marketplace Item FL225)
- *Repentance and Confession in the Orthodox Church* by Fr. John Chryssavgis, (Holy Cross Orthodox Press)

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

- The lives of the saints contain thousands of stories touching upon these themes. Share one of these stories and talk about what we can learn from it.
- Discuss the importance of having a spiritual father, and the importance of regular confession.

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C. Once you have chosen a direction, learn more about the topic. Here are some recommended resources and readings:

- Be the Bee episode #89, The freedom of forgiveness by Steven Christoforou
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kIZtME6zyQo&list=PLbyQMR-r8bJTrcWpWxSUPdJHdZJsq_zG&index=89
- True Repentance, in Tending the Garden of our Hearts by Elissa Bjeletich and Kristina Wenger, September 2019.
https://www.ancientfaith.com/podcasts/tendingthegarden/true_repentance