

## CHRISTIAN PARENTING AND LIVING LIFE IN CHRIST

## REFLECTION ON LIFE IN CHRIST

In North America today we are constantly reminded that we do not live in an Orthodox world. We live in a secular world, in the midst of a melting pot of religious and secular teachings. It is the world of Internet, Facebook, U-tube, Tweeter, iPods, e-mails, advertisements, junk mails, TV and radio broadcasting, newspaper, magazine, movie and so on. In a climate where «freedom of speech» is highly valued and protected, these things seem to rule much of our lives. Nevertheless, this is also the world in which each Orthodox Christian experiences his or her own spiritual warfare, a world which constantly challenges one's spiritual growth. For just as on ages past, continuous, ongoing spiritual growth depends not only on the grace of the Holy Spirit, but also on each Christian's efforts to live a life committed to Christ and His Church.

A commitment to a life in Christ and His Church is not just the verbal promise the Godparents make on behalf of the baptized child, nor by the adult himself/ herself in the case of adult Baptism and/or Chrismation. This commitment is sustained, expressed and fulfilled when supported by constant learning of the Faith and by integrating one's knowledge and experience of the faith into the daily life. Sacramental experience and religious education are both parts of a lifelong process, which assists us to actualize the Holy Spirit in our lives. We grow in discernment of sins, acquiring the virtues, fighting vice, becoming holy, growing closer to God.

During this ongoing process of growth, Christians need the support of their community in Christ, their church. In today's society where everyone is expected to behave and talk in a «politically correct» way, and where we are often tempted to bend or twist our values or standards so that we do not offend others, we need more than ever the support of the Church community.

According to the saints, our attitude towards each other reflects our relationship with God, and our attitude towards God reflects our relationship with others. These «others» include children, teenagers, young adults, adults, elderly, clergy and of course, the members of one's own family. *The wellbeing of each Orthodox Christian community depends, in large part, on how the individual members of the Body of Christ relate to each other.* We should prayerfully ask ourselves the following:

**Does my attitude towards my brothers and sisters in Christ reflect my love for God?**

**Am I welcoming the little children just as Christ welcomed them (Matt. 19:13-14)? Do I**

**fret within myself at the smallest movement or sound from a little one in church, instead of rejoicing that they are the church's future?**

**Am I welcoming the exhausted new mother, or any mother with children in the Church? Am I welcoming the father who works on shifts, but still brings his family to the Liturgy on Sunday, driving for more than thirty minutes? Am I looking at my watch to see how late they are instead of praying or thanking God for them?**

**Am I tolerant towards the little children, who make joyful noises exploring different places**

**and things in the church, while the service is going on?**

**Am I welcoming the teenager or the young adult who is dressed like a model from fashion magazine, but who appropriately venerates the icons and follows the Divine Liturgy or other Service? Or am I passing judgment on him or her and the parents?**



**Do I, clergy or lay person, correct misbehaviour in church, on the part of the children or adults, with loving, kind and gentle firmness, or do I make public «scene» humiliating the members of the flock and possible even alienating them from Christ and His Church forever?**

**With my attitude and behaviour, am I bringing others to God or am I doing exactly the opposite? Am I being a witness for the love of Christ in my day-to-day life, and especially in my parish?**

For the growth of our church communities, spiritual guidance and counselling by the parish priest or by someone else, such as a Starez, is of crucial importance during the formative years of the children and particularly of the teenagers, as well as for anyone newly received or baptized into the parish community and anyone else in the Church, for that matter. The priest's abilities to model Christian love, patience, gentleness when dealing with those entrusted to him by God, assists the spiritual formation of that person, no matter what age. Making confession a rigid ritual of absolution for less than a minute or two immediately before Holy Communion cannot lead to real spiritual growth.

From my youth in Bulgaria, I treasure the times I spent with my spiritual father discussing the Orthodox Faith, the saints, the virtues and vices. He

gave me wise instructions how to discern the various shapes of sinfulness. He supported my spiritual growth, urged me to participate in the Liturgical Services, and encouraged me to become more holy. This reminds me that our Holy Orthodox Faith teaches us that God is Love and Christ is forgiving. Our God is not a dictator, a terrorist, a manipulator of people, nor an evaluator of rules and regulations.

We, both the clergy and the faithful, should witness to the love of Christ throughout, and in every area of our lives. We should be role models of kindness, righteousness, and love for our children and youth. We should be supportive to our brothers and sisters in need, and that includes especially the families with children, some of whom have great difficulties in these days.

Think a moment: Do you consider yourself a role model in your parish or in the diocese? Are there young people in your parish who are role models? Maybe some will answer: I am inspired by the saints, by the icons, by the Holy Theotokos. That is good, but is it sufficient for the children and the teenagers? In today's world despite parental control a family may have, the children and young people have easy access to the tempting role models of sin and of this «world» via TV and computers (even if not at home, definitely at school, public library or at friend's house). To counter this, we need to offer them role models in the church community, and even try to be these role models ourselves by our Christ-like-behaviour.

What our children and teenagers need to see is God's love in actions in the midst of the Church community and in the life of their own family. This will assist them to understand that Orthodoxy is a way of life, not just a concept, that God exists not only like someone from the icons, or someone who will put on vestments for the services and feel powerful. By loving example we can assist our children and teenagers to understand that Faith is a way of life, that God is present in the life of His people all the time, not just sometimes.

When we are better integrated into the Orthodox Faith, when we acquire a truly Orthodox identity (which is continuing process), all of us—clergy and laity, adults and children—will be better equipped to deal with the challenges of today's world. We will be able together to learn what in this fallen world can be used in such a way that our Christian identity is not tarnished, and we will be able to support each other in turning away from those elements in the culture which cannot be edifying.

Would the world not be a better place, would the Church not be a healthier community, if all of us were to strive with all our hearts and minds and souls to put our commitment to life in Christ into practice? Let's try harder!

● Antonina Kemilev Dunn

Antonina has been a religious educator in Toronto since 1975. She is married and a mother of 19 years old daughter University student. Antonina graduated with Master of Divinity from St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary in New York in 1984.

## THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST

Cont. from page 8

The resurrection of Jesus Christ means that he will raise up everyone who ever lived — some to eternal life and some to eternal damnation — and Jesus Christ will be the judge of the wicked. All who have trusted in their fallen reason and rejected the claims of Jesus Christ will be raised up from the dead by Jesus Christ himself. He will judge and damn them.

## HOW DO WE RESPOND TO THE RESURRECTION?

How do we respond to the resurrection of Christ? I urge you to repent now and believe in him who is the Judge of the whole world. «Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved.» Paul told the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:31). The Lord Jesus is the Son of God who became man. He is very God and very man. He was crucified,

he died and was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day according to the Scriptures. This same Lord Jesus Christ ascended into the heavens, is ruling and reigning even now, and will come again to judge the living and the dead. Will you bow down before him and be saved forever?

May God give you faith to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and particularly

in the fact that God raised him from the dead. May you come to know that Jesus Christ is the only Savior and there is no other. May we all remember that Jesus is the Judge whom we will all face, because it is appointed to man once to die and then comes judgment. May God have mercy on us, that we will beg for mercy and pardon from him and be saved. Amen.

