
St. John Chrysostom Oratorical Festival 2020



TOPICS, TIPS AND RESOURCES



GREEK ORTHODOX
ARCHDIOCESE OF AMERICA

Department of Religious Education
(800) 566-1088 | religioused@goarch.org | sjcof@goarch.org

St. John Chrysostom Oratorical Festival 2020
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. The Orthodox Church honors the Virgin Mary as the Theotokos. Discuss the role she plays in the Church and as a role model for all Christians.

A. Read the Church’s teachings:

The Life of the Virgin Mary, the Theotokos by Holy Apostles Convent

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

- In our Church we look to the saints for guidance, and just like us, all of the saints even looked to the Virgin Mary for guidance! How has she influenced the Church over the years?
- Discuss the importance of having the Virgin Mary as not just a role model, but as a female role model.
- At a young age, the Virgin Mary was given a huge choice. How are we as Orthodox Christians influenced by her decision?

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

- Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America Online Chapel: www.goarch.org/chapel/
- Orthodox Church of America Lives of the Saints: <https://oca.org/saints/lives>
- Orthodox Christian Information Center, “Theotokos”: <http://orthodoxinfo.com/inquirers/theotokos.aspx>
- Orthodox Christian Network, “Daily Devotion: The Virgin Mary as a Role Model” <http://myocn.net/daily-devotion-the-virgin-mary-as-a-role-model/>
- Holy Apostles Convent, *The Life of the Virgin Mary, the Theotokos* (Holy Apostles Convent, 1997): <https://www.amazon.com/Life-Virgin-Mary-Theotokos/dp/0944359035>

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Junior Division (Grades 7–9)

2. Christ and many Church Fathers often criticized the wealthy. Do Christians need to live a life of poverty? Is it a sin to live a comfortable life?

A. Read the Church’s teachings:

Matthew 19:24

Luke 16:19–31, The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus

Matthew 6:24

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

- Christ said that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God. What do you think He meant by that? How can wealth hinder our salvation?
- We hear many stories about saints who lived in poverty and gave all they had to those poorer than themselves, but did you know that we also have saints who were royalty and lived comfortable lives? How did they live the faith and apply God’s teachings to their lives?
- Matthew 6:24 says, “No man can serve two masters: for either he will love the one and hate the other, or else he will be loyal to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.” How should we apply this passage to our lives?
- How have the words of Christ and examples of the saints helped you with a decision you had to make about money and priorities?

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

- *The Orthodox Study Bible* (Thomas Nelson, 2008) (Orthodox Marketplace item #BIB007)
- St. John Chrysostom, *On Wealth and Poverty* (SVS Press, 1984)
- Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, “Stewardship Campaign Resources”: www.goarch.org/departments/stewardship/campaign
- Fr. Steven Kostoff, “A Different Kind of Wealth”: www.oca.org/reflections/fr.-steven-kostoff/a-different-type-of-wealth

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Junior Division (Grades 7–9)

3. “Lord have mercy” is the most repeated phrase in the Divine Liturgy. What does it mean to truly have mercy?

A. Read the Church’s teachings:

The Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom

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

- In the secular world, we often think of mercy as a selfish act, meaning it is something that we want for ourselves. How does that differ from the Christian calling of having mercy on others?
- Read the petitions from the Divine Liturgy. Why are we asking God to have mercy on us after each one?
- Why is mercy an important part of being a Christian?
- In Matthew 20:30–34, Christ had mercy and compassion by healing two blind men. What was Christ teaching us through His example?
- What can we learn from examples of saints like St. Dionysios of Zakynthos, who had mercy on his brother’s murderer?

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

- The Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom (Holy Cross Orthodox Press), available at www.goarch.org/-/the-divine-liturgy-of-saint-john-chrysostom
- Metropolitan Nathanael of Chicago’s Encyclical on Mercy 2019: <http://chicago.goarch.org/news/metropolitan-nathanaels-encyclical-on-mercy-2019>
- Frederica Matthewes-Green, “Why Do Orthodox Christians Repeat ‘Lord Have Mercy?’”: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OI_UqPQIGeG
- Anthony M. Coniaris, “Kyrie Eleison, Lord Have Mercy”: <https://www.goarch.org/-/kyrie-eleison-lord-have-mercy>
- The Life of St. Dionysios of Zakynthos: <https://www.goarch.org/chapel/saints?contentid=342>

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Junior Division (Grades 7–9)

4. “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4; Deuteronomy 8:3). Discuss the importance of reading Scripture in your life.

A. Read the Church’s teachings:

Matthew 4:4

Deuteronomy 8:3

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

- Have you heard of the term “food for your soul” or “spiritual food”? What do these terms mean? What does it mean to be spiritually hungry?
- How can reading the Bible every day help us in our lives?
- What can the Bible teach us that is different than other inspirational or self-help books?

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

- *The Orthodox Study Bible* (Thomas Nelson, 2008) (Orthodox Marketplace item #BIB007)
- Shannon Sakellariou, *Lamp to My Feet: An Introduction to the Bible Zine – Student* (Department of Religious Education) (Orthodox Marketplace item #M13)
- “Daily Readings” smartphone app created by the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese Department of Internet Ministries
- Orthodox Christian Fellowship (OCF), “How to Read the Bible & Where to Start”: <https://www.ocf.net/how-to-read-the-bible-where-to-start/>
- GOA Department of Youth & Young Adult Ministries, *Be the Bee* #128: “How to Read the Bible”: <https://www.goarch.org/-/how-to-read-the-bible>

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5. The theme of the upcoming 2020 Clergy–Laity Congress is “the greatest of these is love” (1 Corinthians 13:13). Discuss the way St. Paul defines love in this important chapter of the Bible.

A. Read the Church’s teachings:

1 Corinthians 13

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

- We have often heard of 1 Corinthians 13 referred to as the “Love Chapter”; how does this chapter of the Bible define love for us?
- There are many different meanings for love. What kind of love is St. Paul referring to in this chapter?
- Read Christ’s new commandment in John 13:34–35. Why are Christians called to love?
- In Matthew 5:44 Christ says, “But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” Why is it not enough to only love those who love us?

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

- *The Orthodox Study Bible* (Thomas Nelson, 2008) (Orthodox Marketplace item #BIB007)
- St. John Chrysostom, *The Love Chapter* (Paraclete Press 2009) (Orthodox Marketplace Item #FL321)
- George Tsongranis, “What is Love?”: <http://blogs.goarch.org/blog/-/blogs/what-is-love>
- Fr. Thomas Hopko, *The Orthodox Faith: Volume IV – Spirituality*: <https://oca.org/orthodoxy/the-orthodox-faith/spirituality/the-greatest-virtue-is-love>

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Senior Division (Grades 10–12)

1. Discuss how the separation of church and state benefits us as Orthodox Christians in the United States.

A. Read the Church’s teachings:

Matthew 22:21

Romans 13:1–7

Matthew 22:15–22

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

- Here in the United States, we are given the freedom to practice whatever religion we want, without anyone outside of our church leadership getting involved. How has that helped our Orthodox Church grow into what it is today?
- While it is true that a saintly monarch might help to spread Christianity, it is also true that a selfish, corrupt or heretical ruler can do a great deal of damage. How does the separation of church and state help to protect Christians from bad rulers?
- How has the separation of church and state helped you express your faith publicly?
- Think carefully about the “render unto Caesar” passage (Matthew 22:21). There are so many ways to interpret Jesus’s words and how this can relate to the separation of church and state.

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

- Public Orthodoxy, “Orthodoxy, Human Rights & Secularization”:
<https://publicorthodoxy.org/2016/04/05/orthodoxy-human-rights-secularization/>
- Research the Seventh Ecumenical Council. The story of the iconoclasm is a prime example of the way that emperors could destroy Christian practice.
- Stanley S. Harakas, *Living the Faith: The Praxis of Eastern Orthodox Ethics*, p. 259–293 (Light and Life Publishing Company, 1993)
- *The Orthodox Church: 455 Questions and Answers* (Light & Life, 1987), see #298, #299, #362

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Senior Division (Grades 10–12)

2. In his enthronement address, Archbishop Elpidophoros said, “We are all deacons.” Discuss the importance of being a deacon—a servant—in the Church.

A. Read the Church’s teachings:

Acts 6:1–15

1 Timothy 3:8–13

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

- What is the role of a deacon in our Church? How are we all deacons?
- Why is it important for us to be a servant in the Church? Who are we supposed to be serving, and how?
- Consider the historical role of female deacons as an example of the possibility that we can all be deacons.

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

- Archbishop Elpidophoros of America, “Enthronement Address”:
<https://www.goarch.org/-/enthronement-address-archbishop-elpidophoros>
- Resources on the St. Phoebe Center for the Deaconess website:
<https://orthodoxdeaconess.org/>
- The Holy Sacrament of Ordination to the Diaconate: <https://www.goarch.org/-/the-holy-sacrament-of-ordination-to-the-diaconate>
- The life of St. Philip the Deacon:
<https://www.goarch.org/chapel/saints?contentid=236>
- John Chryssavgis, *Remembering and Reclaiming Diakonia: The Diaconate Yesterday and Today* (Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2009):
<https://holycrossbookstore.com/products/remembering-and-reclaiming-diakonia>

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Senior Division (Grades 10–12)

3. Discuss the significance of Constantinople in Church history and the struggles Orthodox Christians in Constantinople face today.

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

- Consider the role of Constantinople as the host site for three of the Ecumenical Councils (the second, fifth and sixth). Even Nicaea, the city of the first and seventh ecumenical councils, was a suburb of Constantinople.
- Consider the historical role of Constantinople as the site of intersection for church and state for the Byzantine empire.
- Consider the decline of Christianity's significance in Constantinople/Istanbul as a symbol of the broader decline and persecution of Christianity in the Middle East today.

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

- Visit the website of the Ecumenical Patriarchate: www.patriarchate.org
- Stephania Gianulis, *First Among Equals: The Ecumenical Patriarchate Zine - Student* (Department of Religious Education) (Orthodox Marketplace Item #M19)
- Visit the website for the Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate: www.archons.org

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4. How have modern-day saints from the past 100 years, from St. Nektarios to St. Paisios and others, helped Orthodox Christians live their lives today?

A. Read the Church’s teachings:

The lives of the Saints

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

- We are not a Church of the past, we are a Church of today. How can we learn from modern-day saints to help us with our Christian life?
- It can be hard to live a good Christian life in our modern world, but it is so hopeful to know that there are saints walking through contemporary life just like we are. How can modern-day saints inspire us today?
- Choose one or several from the many modern-day saints and discuss their impact on our lives today; for example: St. Maria of Paris, St. Porphyrios, St. Paisios, St. John Maximovitch, St. Nektarios, St. Sophrony of Essex, etc.

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

- Orthodox Church of America Lives of the Saints: <https://oca.org/saints/lives>
- Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America Online Chapel: <http://www.goarch.org/chapel/>
- Life of St. Maria of Paris (this can be found in many places, including: <https://www.oca.org/saints/lives/2001/07/20/108892-righteous-martyr-maria-skobtsova>)
- Life of St. John Maximovitch (this can be found in many places, including: <http://orthochristian.com/54575.html>)

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5. “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares” (Hebrews 13:2). How might Orthodox Christians put this command into practice?

A. Read the Church’s teachings:

Hebrews 13:2

Genesis 18, The Hospitality of Abraham

Isaiah 1:16–17

Matthew 25:31–46

Luke 24:13–35

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

- How can we use Hebrews 13:2 to help us to be more welcoming to newcomers in our parishes?
- Read the story of the Greek fishermen who helped to save Syrian refugees. How do their examples reflect Hebrews 13:2?
- How might a parish welcome people who are different ethnically, racially, or those with disabilities?

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

- Metropolitan Gerasimos of San Francisco, “Message for the new Ecclesiastical Year 2019”: <https://sanfran.goarch.org/news/message-from-metropolitan-gerasimos-for-the-new-ecclesiastical-year-2019>
- Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America, “Go and Make Disciples: Evangelization and Outreach in US Orthodox Parishes”: <http://www.assemblyofbishops.org/news/2017/evangelization-study-report>
- Story of Greek Fishermen rescuing refugees: <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2015/10/05/saving-migrants-drowning-daily-job-greek-fisherman-lesbos/73334380/>
- Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America, “Disability and Communion: Embracing People with Disabilities within the Church”: <http://www.assemblyofbishops.org/news/scoba/disability-and-communion>