

UOCC Church Camps Theme 2007

“Walk as Children of the Light”

Resource Material

WEEK ONE

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| MONDAY OF WEEK 1 |
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Prayer in Church

Scripture Reading – Isaiah 6:1-8

Isaiah’s vision of how the angels worship God in heaven.

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one cried to another and said:

“ Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!”

And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke.

So I said: “ Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.”

Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal, which he had taken with the tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth with it, and said: “ Behold, this has touched your lips; your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged.”

Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: “Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?” Then I said, “Here am I! Send me.”

What the Fathers say:

Take heed, then, often to come together to give thanks to God, and show forth His praise. For when you assemble frequently in the same place, the powers of Satan are destroyed, and the destruction at which he aims is prevented by the unity of your faith.

– St. Ignatius of Antioch

Something to think about:

Sometimes people say that they don't have to go to church. They say, "I can pray to God at home, or anywhere." This may be true, but there is something very important about gathering together to pray.

When something really special happens in our life, we want to share it with others. It is too exciting or too important to keep to ourselves. There is nothing more special in life than the love that God has for us. If it were not for God's love, we would not have been created in the first place. If God did not love us, he would not have sent us His own Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to save us even after humanity had turned away from Him.

If we are going to share birthdays, holidays and other special events with those around us, then it only makes sense that we will gather together with our sisters and brothers in the Faith to celebrate with them God's wonderful gifts to us.

Today's Bible reading is from the Book of the Holy Prophet Isaiah. Isaiah had a vision of God sitting on His throne in heaven. What we heard should sound familiar to us: the Lord sitting on high; the house being filled with smoke; the angels hymn of "Holy, holy, holy..." All of these things are part of our own Divine Liturgy.

We believe that when we come together for a service, we join the angels and the saints in heaven and worship God before His throne. We model our worship after the visions of heaven in the Bible; because these show us the way that God wants us to worship Him.

What a great blessing is it for to come together, not only with those in the church building that day, but also with all the saints to worship God at His holy throne.

Suggested Discussion Themes

Under 12: The iconostas.

Take the children into the camp chapel, or if you are at a camp that does not have its own church, pass out pictures of an iconostas.

Review the icons on the main (lowest) level of the iconostas. Although icons above this level will differ among churches, the main level remains the same. The icons are as follows, from left to right:

- St. Nicholas the Wonder-worker

St. Nicholas was famous for his charity. His icon reminds us that we all must be willing to help others, including our parish, our community and especially those who are in need.

- North Deacon's Door – Archangel or a Deacon

This is the door that is used by clergy and altar servers to go in and out of the sanctuary. Because it is called a Deacon's Door, it sometimes has an icon of a holy deacon on it. Sometimes, it will have an icon of an angel because when deacons serve they symbolize the angels serving around God's heavenly throne.

- Mother of God with the Christ-Child

Represents the first coming of Christ, born of the Mother of God and Ever-Virgin Mary.

- The Royal Doors

These doors represent the gates of heaven. They will have either the icons of the four Evangelists (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) and/or the icon of the Annunciation, when the Archangel Gabriel announces to Mary that she has been chosen to give birth to the Saviour. It is through Mary accepting to give birth to Jesus Christ, the Savior that we have a way back into heaven. Also, the Gospels of the four Evangelists show us the way to heaven.

- Our Lord Jesus Christ

Represents the second coming of Christ. The space between the icon of the Mother of God and the icon of Christ represents the time that we are in now, between His first and second comings. This is the time that we have to work out our salvation. It is for the reason that the Gospel is read from this spot, and the sacraments are ministered from here. Everything that we have for our salvation happens here.

- South Deacon's Door – Archangel or a Deacon

Same as North Deacon's Door.

- Patronal Icon

On the far right-hand side of the iconostas is always the icon of the patron saint of that church: if the church is St. Volodymyr's Church, this will be the icon of St. Volodymyr. If it is the Church of the Holy Transfiguration, it will be an icon of the Transfiguration, etc.

12 & Older: Other examples of heavenly worship

Have the children look over Revelation chapters 4 and 5 to see if they can find anything that resembles what we do in our services.

In the Orthodox Church, we do not read from the Book of Revelation, because it's symbols are very vague and can be easily misinterpreted (as they have been over the centuries many times). However, the Book of Revelation is still used by the Church, as it becomes a model for the way we worship God.

TUESDAY OF WEEK 1

Prayer at Home

Scripture Reading – Matthew 6:5-13

Jesus teaches His disciples how to pray.

“And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words.

“Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him. In this manner, therefore, pray:

Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.
Your kingdom come.
Your will be done
On earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
As we forgive our debtors.
And do not lead us into temptation,
But deliver us from the evil one.
For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen

What the Fathers say:

Blessed is he who, with a hunger that is never satisfied, day and night throughout this present life makes prayer and the psalms his food and drink, and strengthens himself by reading of God's glory in Scripture. Such communion will lead the soul to ever-increasing joy in the age to come. – St. John of Karpathos

Something to think about:

Prayer is a very important part of our lives as Christians. Without prayer, we cannot have the close relationship with God that we are supposed to. Just like we cannot have close relationships with our family and friends without spending quality time with them.

We spend time with God when we pray to Him. It is very important to go to church to pray to God, but church cannot be the only place that we pray. The saints teach us that it is important to pray to God every day.

At the very least, we should say a short prayer at the beginning and the end of the day.

At the beginning of each day, we can make the sign of the Cross and ask God to give us the strength and wisdom that we need to get through the day following His teachings.

At the end of the day, we can make the sign of the Cross and ask God to forgive us when we sinned over the past day and to give us a restful and peaceful night.

Sometimes it's hard to find the right words to say to God when we pray. This is why we have prayer books that help us learn how to pray. Next to the Bible, a prayer book is the most important book we can own. Prayer books give us prayers to say when we get up in the morning, before going to bed at night, and at many other times in our life, like before and after receiving Holy Communion.

We should not think about prayer as an obligation, but a great gift. God hears and answers every prayer. Sometimes, the answer is "Yes". Sometimes, it is "No". Other times, His answer is "Not just yet." Whatever His answer, we pray trusting that God knows what is best and that His will is what counts: "Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven."

Suggested Discussion Themes

Under 12:

Explain to the children what a family icon corner is. Show illustrations, if possible. Have children decoupage two icons: one for themselves to take home and one to put up in an icon corner in their cabin. Make sure that for the cabin icons, children in the same cabin are making different icons. Prints of numerous icons can be obtained from Consistory Church Goods, in Winnipeg: call 1-800-804-6040.

12 & Older:

Review the petitions of the Lord's Prayer. Have the children discuss each one. What do they mean? How do we make them real in our lives? For example:

How do we "hallow" God's name – in other words how do we make God's name holy, how do we honour it?

In this discussion it is important to point out that the original Greek term that we translate into English as "daily bread" is actually closer to "bread of existence", or as we say in Ukrainian "хліб наш насущний". This bread is Jesus Christ, who calls Himself the Bread of Life. Ask the children where we receive the "Bread of Existence". Answer: in Holy Communion. Point out to them that this is why, in the Divine Liturgy, we say the Lord's Prayer just before we receive Holy Communion.

Fasting: Why do we fast?

Scripture Reading – Matthew 17:14-21

Jesus shows that there is strength in fasting.

And when they had come to the multitude, a man came to Him, kneeling down to Him and saying, “Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic and suffers severely; for he often falls into the fire and often into the water. So I brought him to Your disciples, but they could not cure him.”

Then Jesus answered and said, “O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him here to Me.” And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him; and the child was cured from that very hour. Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, “Why could we not cast it out?”

So Jesus said to them, “Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you. However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.”

What the Fathers say:

Fasting is the champion of every virtue, the beginning of the struggle, the crown of the abstinent, the beauty of virginity and sanctity, the resplendence of chastity, the commencement of the path of Christianity, the mother of prayer, the wellspring of sobriety and prudence, the teacher of stillness, and the precursor of all good works. Just as the enjoyment of light is coupled with healthy eyes, so desire for prayer accompanies fasting that is practiced with discernment.

– St. Isaac the Syrian

Something to think about:

Fasting is a very important part of our lives as Christians. It is also one of the things that is often most neglected in our life.

There are four major fasting seasons during the Church Year.

- Great Lent – the 40-day Great Fast before Holy Week and Pascha, Easter Sunday.
- St. Philip’s Fast, or “Advent” – the 40-day fast before Christmas;

- the Apostles' Fast – from the second Monday after Pentecost (usually sometime in the middle of June) to the feast days of Saints Peter and Paul on July 12, and
- the Dormition Fast – starts on August 14 and ends on August 28, the feast of the Dormition (Falling Asleep) of the Mother of God.

We are also called to fast on most Wednesdays and Fridays throughout the year, as well as on other special holy days, like Holy Week and the eve of the Feast of Jordan (the Baptism of our Lord), January 18.

In total, Orthodox Christians spend more than half the year fasting.

Sometimes, people think of fasting like a diet, it will help them lose weight and get physically healthy. While it is true that fasting is very healthy for our bodies, the most important thing about fasting – if we do it right – is that it is very, very good for our souls.

The fasting days and seasons give us time to put aside things in life that are not really that important so that we can spend more time on our relationship with God, as well as our relationship with those whom God has put in our lives. This is what Jesus calls the one thing that is truly needed in life.

Suggested Discussion Themes

Under 12:

We can think of fasting like special training for our souls. *Discuss with the children other areas of their life where they do special training (ex., learning a musical instrument, or playing sports). Get the children to offer examples of this kind of special training from their own lives and interests. Have the children draw pictures of activities that they do that have drills or exercises.*

When we learn a special skill, there are all sorts of drills that we will do to learn the basics. Fasting is like drill that we do to learn how to resist temptations. The saints ask us: How can we expect to say “No” to something we cannot see – a temptation – if we cannot say “No” to something that we can see, like a piece of ham or cheese?

12 & Older:

Sometimes we think that things like fasting are so strange, but if we think about it, there are other times when we are expected to fast in one way or another (for example, going to bed early before a big game, or not eating or drinking anything before taking tests at the doctor's). Discuss some of these, so that the children can come to understand that our disciplines around fasting are not that odd. They make sense in other situations; they also make sense in the Church.

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| THURSDAY OF WEEK 1 |
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Fasting: How do we fast?

Scripture Reading – Matthew 6:16-21

When we fast, Jesus says, we are not supposed to make a big show of it.

“Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

What the Fathers say:

Do you fast? Give me proof of it by your works.

If you see a poor man, take pity on him. If you see a friend being honored, do not envy him. Do not let only your mouth fast, but also the eye and the ear and the feet and the hands and all the members of our bodies. Let the hands fast, by being free of avarice. Let the feet fast, by ceasing to run after sin. Let the eyes fast, by disciplining them not to glare at that which is sinful. Let the ear fast, by not listening to evil talk and gossip. Let the mouth fast from foul words and unjust criticism.

For what good is it if we abstain from birds and fishes, but bite and devour our brothers?

– St. John Chrysostom

Something to think about:

The word “fasting” really means not eating or drinking anything. This is what we do before we receive Holy Communion: we fast (don’t eat or drink anything) from midnight the night before we go to Communion.

The word “fasting” can also mean choosing not to eat certain foods or take part in certain activities. This is what we mean when we speak about fasting during Great Lent.

According to the complete rules of fasting, during one of these seasons we are not to eat any animal products – no meat, no dairy products like cheese or milk, not even fish. We are also not supposed to have olive oil because at one time olive oil was a luxury item. During these fasts there are some days when these guidelines are lightened and we can eat fish or have olive oil, or drink wine, but generally the rules of fasting are pretty intense.

Fasting lets us do three things:

- First, it helps us to cleanse our bodies and our minds. This helps us to take a better look at our souls and our relationship with God.
- Second, our physical hunger when we fast reminds us that we should be as hungry for learning about God and for His teachings as we can be for the foods that we are fasting from.
- Third, fasting helps us strengthen our will power. The saints ask us, “How can we say 'No' to something we cannot see (like a temptation), if we cannot say no to something that we can see (like a hamburger)?”

We live in a world that is so full of things to consume that the idea of going without any of them sounds almost crazy. But if we think about it a bit, we will see that it is a good thing from time to time to let go of the things in life that we don't really need and focus instead of what is truly important.

Suggested Discussion Themes

Under 12:

Have the children go through magazines and look for pictures of foods that we can eat when we fast, and foods we abstain from. Have them cut these pictures out (with and adults help for the younger ones) and make montages with both types of food. One montage can be under the title “Food for Fasting”, the other “Food for After the Fast”.

12 & Older:

Have the children take a piece of paper and draw a line down the middle. At the top put the word “Need” on one side and “Want” on the other. Discuss the various things we have in our life and have the children write them in one of the two categories: are they things we need or things we want?

For example, an MP3 player: want or need? A place to live: want or need?

Some things can be divided up in more detail.

For example, a place to live: what kind of place do we want to live in and what do we need – there is a difference!

Explain that fasting is about abstaining from things in the “Want” category, so that we can put more attention on things that we “Need”.

When God promises to give us all things in abundance, He is specifically speaking of the things that we need. God may not give us everything that we want, but He will always make sure that we don't lack the things that we need.

If they do not list God as a “Need” themselves, as the lesson is coming to a close ask them what one “Need” is missing from the list. Have each child put in big bold letters “JESUS CHRIST” in their “Need” list.

Jesus says, “Without Me you can do nothing.”(John 15:5) Having Christ in our lives is our greatest need.

Acts of Mercy (“Almsgiving”)

Scripture Reading – Matthew 25:31-40

We will be judged based on how we treated other people.

“When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.’

“Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’ And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.’”

What the Fathers say:

The merciful person is he who gives to others what he has himself received from God, whether it be money, or food, or strength, a helpful word, a prayer, or anything else that he has through which he can express his compassion for those in need. At the same time he considers himself a debtor, since he has received more than he is asked to give.

– St. Peter of Damascus

Something to think about:

The Bible teaches us that it is not enough to just say we are Christians. We have to live a Christian life. One of the most important parts of our life as Christians is how we treat other people. In the Bible reading that we just heard Jesus teaches us that at the end of time all people will be judge first and foremost on how they treated other people.

Acts of mercy are very important in life. If we see someone in need of help, and there is something that we can do to help, then we must offer that person our help. Acts of mercy are important in three ways:

- First, they help the person who is in need.
- Second, they make us feel good, knowing that we were able to lend someone a helping hand and that we have done what God wants us to in that situation.
- Third, they are an important way of serving God. Jesus says that whenever we take care of someone else, we are serving Him. If we say that we love God, we have to show this by also showing love for His creation, and especially for other people since all people are made in God's image and likeness.

Nothing does more harm to the Church than people who say that they are Christian, but do not act in a Christian way. Likewise, nothing does more good for the Church than Christians who are living a true Christian life. The next time we see someone in need, and we can help them, it is good to remember that offer that help is good for that person, for ourselves, and also for our Lord Jesus Christ and His Church.

Suggested Discussion Themes

Under 12:

Read over the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). Have the children act out the Parable itself, which is found in verses 30-35. You will need to have: a narrator to read the parable; a traveler (who gets attacked); a band of robbers; a priest; a Levite; a Good Samaritan; a donkey, and an inn keeper.

Explain to the children: In Jesus' time the Jews and the Samaritans were enemies. They avoided each other whenever they could. When Jesus says that a priest and a Levite would not help the man who was attacked it meant that two of his own people ignored him. It was a stranger – and someone who was supposed to be his “enemy” – who showed mercy on him.

Jesus uses this parable to show that when God says, “Love your neighbour”, He means that we must help anyone who is in need, if we are able to help them.

12 & Older:

Have the children do some kind of work at the camp. For example, clean up the chapel. Explain that this is love shown in actions.

If a community close to your camp has a food bank or a soup kitchen, plan an outing there so the children can visit, or better still can work there for an hour or so.

WEEK TWO

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| MONDAY OF WEEK 2 |
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Humility

Scripture Reading -- Luke 18:10-14

The parable of the Publican and the Pharisee

“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.’

And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’

I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

What the Fathers say:

No man has understanding if he is not humble, and he who lacks humility is devoid of understanding. No man is humble if he is not peaceful, and he who is not peaceful is not humble.

— St. Isaac the Syrian ·

Something to think about:

The saints teach us that the beginning of every kind of sin is pride. When we think of the word “pride”, we usually think about people feeling good about something that they have done. But this is not how the saints are using the word “pride”.

When the saints speak about “pride” they mean the belief that I am the most important person in the world, that there is no one else who is as good as I am. When people let this kind of pride take them over, they can even think that they are more important than God.

If I think that I am the best person in the world, it becomes easy to starting thinking that what anyone else thinks or feels doesn’t really matter. When we think like this, it is easy

to lie or steal or hurt someone, because in our minds they don't really matter anyway, so there was really no harm done.

The way that we fight pride is with humility. "Humility" means knowing that, although I am very special and important (since we are all made by God and are loved greatly by Him), I am not the most important person in the world. I don't know everything. I have to respect the feelings and thoughts of others. Especially, I have to listen to God 's teachings and I have to follow them. This is what true humility is. By being truly humble, we can begin to get closer to God.

Suggested Discussion Themes

Under 12:

Sometimes we think that bigger is better. Sometimes people who are bigger and stronger than us will think that they are better than us. This is not true. There is beauty in small things as well as in big things.

Have the children go on a nature walk to look at small and beautiful things in the world – for example, small plants, insects, small birds and animals.

One way of looking at humility is that we do not try make ourselves look bigger than we really are. Usually, when we try making ourselves look bigger, we also make someone else feel smaller. A humble person is a person who can be themselves without trying to show that we are better than someone else. There is strength and beauty in who we are, no matter what our size is.

12 & Older:

Advertising agencies play on pride to get people to buy the things that they are promoting. A couple of common themes in ads are: "Buy this product and you will be stronger, more popular, more respected, etc."; or, "Get what you want, how you want, and when you want it". Another thing ads do is try convince people that things that they might want are things that they need.

These messages are spiritually toxic and completely in opposition to teachings of Christ. For example, last week we talked about the big difference between wants and needs. The Bible teaches us that God will always provide us with what we need, but not necessarily with everything that we want. A prideful person will be very angry with God for not answering his or her every request. A humble person peace in their hearts, knowing that God will always give us what we really need in life.

Have children examine magazine ads (or recorded TV commercials) and discuss what these ads are saying (either openly or in more subtle ways) about how we should look at ourselves, especially our wants and needs.

TUESDAY OF WEEK 2

Forgiveness

Scripture Reading – Luke 6:37,38

To be forgiven by God, we have to forgive those who wrong us.

“Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.”

What the Fathers say:

If, in the case of one human being who has done wrong to another, God in His grace has commanded that we should be forgiving to the offender seventy times seven, how much more will God forgive the person who offers up prayers for his sins?

– St. John the Solitary

Something to think about:

Perhaps one of the hardest things that our Lord Jesus Christ expects us to do is forgive those who hurt us. It is natural for us to get angry when someone hurts us. The first thing that we want to do is hurt that person back. But, Jesus teaches us that when someone hurts us we have to forgive them.

When we forgive someone we are choosing to let go of our anger and our ill feelings for them. Forgiving someone doesn't mean that we are saying that what they did was okay. If someone hurts us, especially in very severe ways – like bullying for example, they need to be told that what they are doing is wrong and that they must stop.

The Bible reading that we heard today shows us that forgiveness is very important for us. God is very fair. The way that we treat others will be the way that God treats us. If we are merciful and forgiving with others when they wrong us, God will be merciful and forgiving with our sins against Him.

Sometimes we can forgive people right away. This is a great blessing from God. Other times, it takes us longer to get through our bitter feelings. Either way, forgiveness must be a part of our Christian lives.

As Christians we are supposed to follow our Lord Jesus Christ's example in all things. Just as Jesus forgave those who crucified Him, we must also forgive those who hurt us, or neglect us, or make us feel bad in any way.

Suggested Discussion Themes

Under 12:

Read the children the story of Zaccheus in Luke 19:1-10.

After reading them the story, explain why people thought tax collectors like Zaccheus were sinners:

Very often tax collectors would take more money from people than they needed to. For example, if the Emperor asked for 5 gold pieces from every person as the tax for that year, the tax collectors would take 10 gold pieces; they would give the emperor the five he wanted, and they would keep the other five for themselves. This is not honest; it is stealing from the people who are paying their taxes.

The Bible story about Zaccheus shows us that he was sorry that he had been cheating people. But he didn't just say he was sorry, he showed he was sorry. How do we know he was sorry? (Answer: He offers to give people back four times the amount that he stole from them.) Zaccheus' new attitude pleases Jesus. He says, "Today, salvation has come to this house."

Ask the children what are some ways that we can show that we are sorry for something. If they do not mention it themselves, point out that the most important way that we show we are sorry about something is by not doing it again.

For example, if someone calls us a bad name, then says they are sorry, but then calls us the same thing the next day, we will not think that they were serious about their apology. When we say we are sorry about something, especially when we say "Sorry" to God, we have to do our absolute best to not do the same thing again.

12 & Older:

*Review and discuss these "Seven Steps to Forgiving Someone"**

1.) Make the choice to forgive: Forgiveness does not happen on autopilot. We have to choose to forgive someone, and once we have made that choice, we must purposefully take the following, real steps to make that forgiveness a reality.

2.) Be ready to hurt in order to heal: Many of us cannot forgive, because we shy away from the negative feelings surrounding what happened.

3.) Let go of our "right" to revenge: When someone hurts us, the first thing we want to do is

hurt them back. We will then spend lots and lots of time and energy either trying to hurt them or imagining them hurting. This is very unhealthy. It only prolongs the ill feelings. The longer our nasty feelings are around, the more everyone involved (including ourselves) become poisoned by them. Besides, we really have no "right" for revenge, anyway.

4.) Remind ourselves that the person is only human: When we hurt someone, the first thing we'll say is, "Hey I'm only human!" We have to offer the person the same consideration, as we would want for ourselves. Human beings will make mistakes.

5.) Really wish the person well: We may not ever go back to the same relationship as we once had with the person, but we still must wish only the best for those who hurt us. If the person is particularly hard to deal with, or even abusive, then part of "the best" for them is that they would see how their actions are hurting others and would stop behaving this way.

6.) Pray for the person: One of the most powerful things that we can do when we are dealing with ill feelings towards someone is to pray for them. It is pretty hard to have nasty thoughts about someone while we are asking God to bless them and have mercy on them. This is the most important way of wishing the best for the person: asking God to fill his or her life with love and peace.

7.) Repeat, as necessary: Only in some cases is forgiveness immediate – in this case it is truly a Divine gift. More often than not, forgiveness is a journey that we take. From time to time, we will find that the hurt and anger rise up again. At these times, we must repeat steps 1 to 6 again. As we do this, we will find that when these feelings do come back, they are not as intense as the time before. Eventually, we will look at the incident with peace of mind and heart. This does not mean that we will be sanctioning the behavior, but simply that we have reached the point where that incident no longer victimizes us.

*Based on the writing of Tim Timmons in "Anyone Anonymous", Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1990.

WEDNESDAY OF WEEK 2

Faith

Scripture Reading – Philippians 3:8-10

St. Paul says that nothing else in his life is as important to him as his faith in Jesus Christ.

Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection...

What the Fathers say:

Faith consists not only of being baptized in Christ, but also in fulfilling His commandments. Holy Baptism is perfect and gives us perfection, but does not make perfect those who do not follow the commandments.

– St. Mark the Ascetic

Something to think about:

St. Paul says that faith is “the evidence of things that we cannot see”. This means that there is more to our lives than what we can see, or taste, touch, hear, or smell.

For example, we believe that the angels and the saints exist. The icons that we have in our church remind us that when we gather together for services, the saints and angels gather with us. We all worship God together. This is why we sing the “Thrice-holy Hymn”: “Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us.” The Bible teaches us that this hymn – “Holy, Holy, Holy” – is the song that the angels sing in heaven. When we sing this hymn, we are joining in with the angels and the saints as they praise God.

Most of all, we believe in God. In the Orthodox Church, we believe that God is a Trinity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. We say that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are three divine persons who share one Divine nature. Father, Son and Holy Spirit are three unique Divine beings, but they are all equally God. This is just like everyone in this room are all equally human beings but we are all different people.

Suggested Discussion Themes

Under 12: The sign of the Cross

Review with the children how we make the sign of the Cross. Every time we cross ourselves, we are saying what we believe in.

As we touch our thumb, index finger and middle finger together, we are showing our belief in one God (fingers together), who is Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (three fingers).

As we fold our ring finger and pinky down into our palm we are showing our belief in Jesus Christ, who was both God and man (the two fingers together), who for our salvation came down to earth and proclaimed the Gospel to us (fingers folded down).

When we make the sign of the Cross we first touch our foreheads, asking God to bless our minds with wisdom. We then touch our chests, asking God to fill our hearts with love. Finally we touch our right shoulder, then our left, asking God to give us strength to resist temptation and to follow His teachings.

It is important to impress upon the children that how we make the sign of the Cross is important. We should do it with great care. The way we hold our hands tells about the God that we believe in, and how we make the cross tells about how God works in our life, giving us wisdom, love and strength.

12 & Older:

Discuss with the children the biblical teaching of Creation, found in Genesis 1, and scientific theories about the evolution. It is important to point out that the media says that these two teachings are contradictory, but this is not necessarily the case. There are many parallels in the two accounts of the beginning of the world.

For example, in Hebrew, the original language of the Book of Genesis, the word that we translate into English as “day” – as in the first “day” of Creation – also means “era”. The six days of creation symbolically represent six “eras”, or stages, of creation.

We cannot “prove” what Genesis teaches. We accept it by faith. At the same time, evolution is only a theory, not a proven law. The definition of a theory is a best guess as to how something happened, which has also not been completely proven. On both sides, you have to choose to believe, and it is possible to accept both.

Faith and science do not have to be at war with each other. Many scientists, for example, believe in God. And many of the saints were well versed in the secular teachings of their day. Faith teaches that God made the world. Science helps us understand a little better how He made it.

THURSDAY OF WEEK 2

Hope

Scripture Reading – Psalm 16:7-11

A hymn of praise to the God who will never let us down

I will bless the Lord who has given me counsel; my heart also instructs me in the night seasons. I have set the Lord always before me; because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices; my flesh also will rest in hope. For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption. You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

What the Fathers say:

He who has once placed his hope in God no longer is concerned over himself, and in whatever he does, in everything, he will find profit for his soul.

– St. Paisiy Velichkovsky

Something to think about:

When we want to learn about what we believe as Orthodox Christians, we can look at the Creed. We say the Creed every Sunday at the Divine Liturgy. The Creed was written more than 1600 years ago, at two very important Church councils. These were called the First and Second Ecumenical Councils.

The Creed was written at a time when there were some false teachings going around about God. The bishops at the first two Ecumenical Councils wrote the Creed to set things straight, so that everyone would understand the Church's true teachings about God.

When we say the Creed we say that we believe in “One God, the Father Almighty...”, “in One Lord, Jesus Christ, the Son of God...”, and “in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver-of-Life...”. A very short, but very, very important word in these lines is the word “in”: “I believe in...” We do not say that we simply believe that there is a God, we believe in God.

For Orthodox Christians, God is not like “the force” in Star Wars – an energy. God is a being full of love and mercy who wants to have a loving relationship with each one of us. God made us and He cares for us very much. So, He offers us teachings, and a Way of life that will lead us closer and closer to Him.

God's promise is that if we believe in Him, he will never let us down. He will always be there for us, even in our darkest hour.

When we say that we believe "in" God, we mean that we don't just believe that He is out there somewhere. We put all of our trust in Him and His teachings. We know that He will never let us down. In other words, God love and mercy give us hope. It is this hope that carries us through even the hardest times.

Suggested Discussion Themes

Under 12:

Have the children prepare drawings or montages of the four seasons.

In the middle of winter, when it's cold and miserable, what can help keep our spirits up is knowing that spring will come and things will warm up again. After spring will come summer, when it will be hot and we can go outside without having to bundle up in coats, boots and mittens.

Think about some of the promises that God gives us. (*Examples strength in times of trial, wisdom to make good decisions, a place in His Kingdom if we follow His Gospel*). We can believe that God will keep His promises just like we know that the seasons will change every year. Sometimes it might seem like things aren't going to ever be different, just like in the middle of winter we might feel it will never warm up. But God's word is as certain as the changing of the seasons.

12 & Older:

Read the story of the Holy Prophet Elijah in 1 Kings 17:7-16.

The widow in the story makes bread for Elijah, her son and herself hoping in God's promise that she will not run out of food. Notice there are two things at work here. First, is God's promise. Second, is the woman's willingness to act on that promise. Hope is not the same as wishful thinking. Wishful thinking is just sitting back and waiting for something to happen, without any reason to assume that it will happen. Hope in God involves acting – doing something.

When God calls us to action and gives us a promise, it is when we do what He calls us to that He is faithful to His promise. What God tells us to do is not always easy – sometimes it doesn't even seem to make sense at first (like the widow making bread out of the last of her supplies). But when we act on God's word, He will never let us down.

FRIDAY OF WEEK 2

Love

Scripture Reading – 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

St. Paul teaches how important love is in life.

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

What the Fathers say:

"He that loves Me," says the Lord, "will keep My Commandments"; and "this is My commandment, that you love one another." He therefore who does not love his neighbor does not keep the commandment. Nor is he that does not keep the commandment able to love the Lord.

– St. Maximos the Confessor

Something to think about:

In the Bible there are several words for love. The one that St. Paul uses in the reading the we just heard is the same one that Jesus uses when He says things like, "God is

love,” “Love your neighbour”, or “Love your enemy.” This word is “agape” (*note: pronounced ah-GAH-pé*).

In the Bible, the word “agape” means “unselfish love” or “unconditional love”. When we love someone with “agape”, we love them just for the sake of loving them and for no other reason. Gods loves us with “agape”. He does not expect anything from us for His love. He does not set any conditions on His love. Even when we sin and go against His teachings, He still loves us and wants to see us turn back to Him.

We can even have agape love for people we don’t like that much. Jesus says “Love your enemy” – or “have agape for your enemies”. Loving our enemies means that deep down inside, we only want what is best for them. If someone is hurting us, it does not mean that we are saying that what they are doing is okay; but it does mean that we cannot hold any nasty feelings for them in our hearts.

In life we are called to follow Jesus in all things. Jesus had agape love for all people, even the ones who hung Him on the cross to die. Agape love is not always easy, but it must be the kind of love that we hold in our hearts for all people. Loving people with agape is the way that we show ourselves to be true disciples – followers – of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Suggested Discussion Themes

Under 12:

It is wonderful to say to someone, “I love you.” Something that is even more wonderful is to do something for someone else that says, “I love you.” For example, to love someone means never being just a “fair weather friend” – being close to them when things are going well, and then deserting them when things get rough.

Have the children think of things that their family or friends do that show the children that they are loved by these people; also discuss with them things that they can do for others to show that they (the children) love them. Have them draw an example of both.

12 & Older:

In the New Testament, we read about four different types of love. The first one is “philia” (pronounced fil-EE-a). Philia is the love between friends. The English word “philanthropy” comes from this Greek word. Philanthropy literally means treating all people as your friends.

Next is “storge” (pronounced “stor-GEE” – with a hard “g” as in “geese”). Storge is tender or affectionate love. This is the love that a parent has for a child. This word can also be translated as kindness.

The third type of love is “eros” (EE-ros). This is the intimate love shared by a husband and wife. This love is expressed in a very special way through sexual relations. In the Orthodox Church we believe that sex is a holy thing. The reason that God has put such clear restrictions around it – that is, only a man and woman committed to each other in marriage – is to preserve the holiness of sexual intimacy.

Finally, the one we have already talked about is “agape” – selfless love. Like we said before, it is this fourth type of love that Jesus and His apostles mean when they say that we are to love all people.

We might not be friends with everyone. We might not share affection for all people. And we certainly will not have sexual relations with just anyone. However, we can love all with “agape” – we don’t even have to know the person... or even like them that much.

Agape love means always hoping for the best for people and thinking of them in no other but the best possible way. This is certainly not easy, but it is the most Christ-like thing that we can do.