

CHALLENGE

THE PULSE OF ORTHODOX YOUTH

Giving Thanks to God by the Way We Live

by Chris Avramopoulos

How often do you find yourselves being asked by your parents to say, "thank you?" Whenever you are offered a treat from a friend or an adult helps you out, you hear a voice from over your shoulder, "Now, what do you say?" Of course your parents want you to be respectful and use good manners, and this is why they teach you to say, "Thank you," but I wonder if we truly know what it means to be thankful.

Thankfulness is a state of being and a way of life for all Orthodox Christians, for you and me. A thankful spirit is a key characteristic of a Christian. It sets us apart from the world. It makes us different.

Thankfulness is more than a comparison of our own circumstances to someone else's. It is more than having enough food to eat, a nice home, good health, or financial security, because any of these can be lost in an instant. Thankfulness is being grateful to God for who we are His sacrifice for us, and the hope and joy of everlasting life.

But how do we show our thankfulness to God?

Faith in Good Works:

First, the Orthodox Christian life is a life of faith — faith in a Lord who laid His life down for our salvation. No one would deny the fact that the Christian life is one full of faith. But St. James tells us that if we have true Christian faith, it will be shown in our good works.

He writes, "What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself (James 2:14, 17)." He is telling us that



if you have faith in Christ, and your life is locked into that faith, then your faith will naturally lead you to do good works. The proof of your faith is in good works. Can the proof be found in your life? Again St. James says, "But prove yourselves doers of the word and not just hearers who delude themselves" (James 1:22). Too often we join the people who hear but fail to produce the works that would make us doers. By doing the good works that Jesus taught us to do, we show by our actions that our faith is real. The proof of thanksgiving in the Christian Life is Faith that produces good works.

Love Equals Sacrifice:

But it doesn't just stop here. The Christian Life is a life of Love. Love not in just words but in action, and love in action is Sacrifice. Love is sacrifice. St. John tells us "We know love by this that He laid down His life for us." (1 John: 3). We must sacrifice our will for the will of Christ, just as He sacrificed His will for the will of the Father.

Many of you might be involved in sports and many of your games might take place on a Sunday morning. What do you

do? Do you continue to participate in a league that causes a conflict between you and your faith that holds Sunday morning as a time dedicated to the sacred worship; a faith that offers the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ in Holy Communion for all the faithful to receive Him and become one with Him?

Which will you choose? If you sacrifice your participation in this league that plays on Sunday mornings, it is a real way of showing that you put God first.

It shows that Christ is so important in your life that you want to show it by offering thanksgiving and worship to Him at Sunday Divine Liturgy.

We have already said that Works are the proof of Faith, and Sacrifice shows our Love. But there is one more aspect of our thankfulness to Christ that we need to think about. Discipleship/Apostles for Christ:

What does it mean to be a disciple? We know the original 12 Disciples followed Jesus, and traveled with Him during His ministry.

They lived with Him and ate with Him, took on His ways, His teachings, His

values, and His character. Not only that, but they also became apostles by teaching the faith to others, helping others to know Jesus. They were true followers, true disciples of Jesus. We as Orthodox Christians in the 21st Century are also disciples by living as He taught us. In the Gospel of John, Jesus says, "If you abide in my word you are my disciples indeed (John 8:31)." Jesus was saying that if you are trying to live your life the way I have taught you, then you are my follower. You can truly be called a Christian.

If you love the way He has told you to love — by SACRIFICE — then you are part of Him and the proof of your thankfulness is clear. If you try to walk in Faith, do His Works, and are obedient to His will, the proof of your thankfulness is clear.

A tree branch stays alive and bears fruit only because it is attached to and draws nourishment from the tree. We are the branches and Jesus is the tree. We draw nourishment through Him.

Being thankful to God is not just an idea. Often we say things but there is no substance behind it. We've talked about real ways of showing our thanks to God — not just in words but in the way we offer our lives to God:

Faith leads us to do works of charity, help those in need, offering our time and talents;

Love encourages us to sacrifice our lives and be obedient to the will of God, so that our will is the same as the will of God; and,

Living a Christ-centered life and walking in His ways, as His disciples and apostles did, bring us to the very center of our Faith.

Chris Avramopoulos has served as director of Youth and Young Adult Ministries for the Metropolis of Chicago since 2003. He is a '92 graduate of the University of Wisconsin, Madison and a '98 graduate of Holy Cross School of Theology. He served as the National YAL Coordinator from 2002-04 and has worked in youth and young adult ministry for more than 15 years.

#LiveOrthodoxy This Thanksgiving

1) Attend Church: During these holiday/vacation weekends, we tend to "slack off" when it comes to our attendance in Church services. However, the Divine Liturgy and other services are the best way to give glory and thanksgiving to God. Make it a point to attend Divine Liturgy as a family.

2) Make a "Thank You" Prayer List: Make a list of people or things for which you are thankful. You will quickly see how many blessings you actually have. Whether you have three or thirty things on your list, say a special prayer on Thanksgiving and every day for those blessings.

3) Volunteer at a homeless shelter: With the incredible feasts during the Thanksgiving holiday, it is easy to forget those who will go without one simple, hot meal. Many homeless shelters serve Thanksgiving meals to those who come. Take the time to volunteer at a shelter that is serving meals this year.

4) Simply remember to say "Thank You": We find ourselves forgetting to say "thank you" on a daily basis. So say "thank you" to your youth group advisors, teachers, parents, and to anyone who does something kind for you.

5) Plan a Food Drive: Nearly 17.2 million households in the United States are considered "food insecure." So even if you've already held a food drive, sponsor another one! Contact your local food bank to see how you can help.

Bible-in-a-Year Video Blog

The Holy Scriptures are very important to our Orthodox Christian faith. The Holy Scriptures offer us instruction on how to live a Christian life, a history of our faith, and guidance on how to handle the many temptations and challenges of this life. Many of us "say" we want to study the Scriptures a little more carefully. However, it is very easy to get intimidated and leave our goal by the wayside.

Why not join others on a daily journey to explore the Bible in a year? Join National Young Adult Ministries Coordinator Nick Lionas, for the "Bible-in-a-Year" YouTube video blog. Using the daily readings provided by the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese, you can learn about the Orthodox Christian faith one day at a time.

You can follow the video blog on your own, follow it as a family, or consider getting a group of friends together to follow along. It is never too late to start learning and growing in your faith! Join today!! For more information about the "Bible in a Year" Video Blog, visit the following links:

GOA Young Adults
Facebook Page
www.facebook.com/GOAyoungadults
List of "Bible in a Year"
Daily Readings
www.goarch.org/archdiocese/departments/youth/youngadultministry/osb-in-one-year.pdf
Y2AM YouTube Channel
www.youtube.com
Channel:
"Y2AM – REAL Orthodoxy"

FOR YOUTH WORKERS AND PARENTS

- Launched in November 2013, *Discovering Orthodox Christianity* is a series of talks, shows, and presentations designed to introduce and explain the basic teaching of Orthodox Christianity. Sponsored by the Leadership 100 Endowment Fund the series covers a wide range of topics, including Orthodox and our Youth featuring Fr. Jason Roll (Archdiocese Director of Youth and Young Adult Ministries! Check out this video and others by visiting www.goarch.org/ourfaith/discovering
- Show us how you #LiveOrthodoxy! Order one of our #LiveOrthodoxy t-shirts and take pictures at your youth/youth adult events, retreats, outings, or simply your everyday activities. Snap with us on Instagram at @GOA_Youth and @GOA_YoungAdults.
- Don't forget to sign up for the YOUTH WORKER PULSE! This is the weekly listserv of the Department of Youth and Young Adult Ministries. Subscribers will receive valuable tips, tools, and resources for creating a successful and transformative youth ministry experience. Sign up today at www.youth.goarch.org.