

Great Lent Retreats

Prepared by the Youth Department

Retreat 1:

Φωτίζου, φωτίζου, η Νέα Ιερουσαλήμ»/
“Shine, do shine, O New Jerusalem”:

Our citizenship in the Church of Christ



THIS RETREAT IS AIMED AT ANSWERING THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

- ✦ What is Resurrection?
- ✦ What is baptism?
- ✦ How are they connected?
- ✦ How did people used to get baptized in the first centuries? Byzantine era? Today?
How do we renew *our* baptismal pledge to Christ?

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Opening Prayer all together: Having beheld the resurrection of Christ, let us worship the holy Lord Jesus, the only Sinless One. We venerate your cross, O Christ, and we praise and glorify your holy resurrection. You are our God. We know no other than you, and we call upon your name. Come, all you faithful, let us venerate the holy resurrection of Christ. For behold, through the cross joy has come to the entire world. Ever praising the Lord, let us praise his resurrection. For enduring the cross for us, He has destroyed death by death.

ASK: With a word, how would you describe “resurrection”?

PLAY: *The Matrix* (Track 36), where Neo “rises from the dead”

ASK: Who is Neo? Who is Trinity? What happens with Neo rising from the dead?

TELL them that the Resurrection of Christ brought the “new Creation” to humanity, and God’s victory over death and the devil.

ACTIVITY: In groups of 3-5, have Youth act out an event that they would connect with “resurrection”. (Allow for 10 minutes of prep time).

In groups, tell them to act out their activity. After commenting on them,

ASK: What is baptism? Why is it important?

PLAY: *The Gospel of John* (DVD 1, Track 4). *In this scene, Jesus and Nicodemus speak about humanity being “born again...in water and the Spirit” (“water” being baptism and “Spirit” being the Sacrament of Chrismation).*

ASK: What is being baptized “of water and the Spirit”? How is Resurrection connected with this?

DESCRIBE: How Christians would be baptized in the early Church, and the Byzantine Church, as well as today. *Make sure to discuss the significance of the “white baptismal garment”.*

Take them to the Church, SHOWING and EXPLAINING the following:

Service of the Catechumens = "Baptism in the Church begins with the rejection of Satan and the acceptance of Christ. Before being baptized, a person -- or his sponsors or **godparents** for him -- officially proclaims the symbol of Christian faith, the Creed. Because the godparent speaks on behalf of the child, sponsors his entrance into the Church and "receives" the child out of the baptismal waters into the Church and cares for his spiritual life, the godparent himself must be a member of the Church." (from www.oca.org/pages/orth_chri/orthodox-faith/worship/Baptism.html) This service is called the service of the Catechumens. Who are catechumens? They were people that would learn the Faith, and were preparing to be baptized.

Font = This is where the children are baptized. People used to get baptized in another building next to the Church, called *baptisteries*. From there, the Christians would have a procession to the Church and participate in the Easter Liturgy (because baptisms took place on the Great Feast of Easter).

Oil = The person to be baptized is also prayed over and blessed with sanctified oil as the sign that his creation by God is holy and good.

Sacrament of Chrismation = "The Sacrament of Chrismation (Confirmation) immediately follows baptism and is never delayed until a later age. As the ministry of Christ was enlivened by the Spirit, and the preaching of the Apostles strengthened by the Spirit, so is the life of each Orthodox Christian sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Chrismation, which is often referred to as one's personal Pentecost, is the Sacrament which imparts the Spirit in a special way. In the Sacrament of Chrismation, the priest anoints the various parts of the body of the newly-baptized with Holy Oil saying: "The seal of the gifts of the Holy Spirit." The Holy Oil, which is blessed by the bishop, is a sign of consecration and strength. The Sacrament emphasizes the truths that not only is each person a valuable member of the Church, but also each one is blessed by the Spirit with certain gifts and talents. The anointing also reminds us that our bodies are valuable and are involved in the process of salvation. The Sacraments of initiation always are concluded with the distribution of Holy Communion to the newly-baptized. Ideally, this takes place within the celebration of the Divine Liturgy. This practice reveals that Orthodoxy views children from their infancy as important members of the Church. There is never time when the young are not part of God's people."



(from <http://www.goarch.org/en/ourfaith/articles/article7105.asp>)

Tonsure = "After the baptism and chrismation the person newly-received into God's family is **tonsured**. The tonsure, which is the cutting of hair from the head in the sign of the cross, is the sign that the person completely offers himself to God -- hair being the symbol of strength (Jud 16:17). Thus, until the fifteenth century the clergy of the Orthodox Church -- the "professional Christians," so to speak -- wore the tonsure all their lives to show that their strength was in God." (from www.oca.org/pages/orth_chri/orthodox-faith/worship/Chrismation.html)

ASK: What are the privileges and responsibilities of baptized Christians?

FINAL ACTIVITY: Ask them to illustrate (by whatever means) how they pledge to keep their "baptismal garment" white (i.e. spotless).

Final Prayer done by the Priest:

O Lord, You that through Holy Baptism have granted forgiveness of sins to Your servants, bestowing on them a life of regeneration: do You Yourself, Sovereign Master and Lord, be pleased that the Light of Your countenance evermore shines in their hearts; maintain the shield of their faith against the plotting of enemies; preserve in them garments of incorruption, which they have put on undefiled and unstained; preserve in them the Seal of Your Grace, being gracious unto us, and unto them according to the multitude of Your compassions, for glorified and blessed is Your all-honorable and majestic Name: of Father, and of Son, and of Holy Spirit, both now and ever, and to the ages of ages. Amen.

Further Recommended Reading

Fr. Alexander Schmemman: "Of Water and the Spirit"

Fr. Stanley Harakas "The Orthodox Church: 455 Questions and Answers" (Light and Life Publishing)

The Archdiocese of America website, *The Sacrament of Holy Baptism* (www.goarch.org/en/chapel/liturgical_texts/baptism.asp?printit=yes)

Retreat 2: Death, Heaven and Hell I : Misconceptions and Truth

We must answer the following questions:

- ✦ What is Heaven?
- ✦ What is Hell?
- ✦ Why do we die?
- ✦ What is death?
- ✦ When and how does one enter Heaven or Hell?
- ✦ Is there a Heaven and Hell?
- ✦ Should we fear death?
- ✦ Does God force us to where we go in the afterlife?
- ✦ Difference in Christ's death and Lazarus' death



Media we can use to illustrate this point: *Ghost*, *Simpsons* (Homer's images of hell, Bart's "Sunday School class" on hell, etc.).

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Opening Prayer, all together: Our Father...

READ: "Footprints"

One night a man had a dream. He dreamed he was walking along the beach with the LORD. Across the sky flashed scenes from his life. For each scene, he noticed two sets of footprints in the sand; one belonging to him, and the other to the LORD.

When the last scene of his life flashed before him, he looked back at the footprints in the sand. He noticed that at many times along the path of his life there was only one set of footprints. He also noticed that is happened at the very lowest and saddest times in his life.

This really bothered him and he questioned the LORD about it. "LORD... you said that once I decided to follow You, You'd walk with me all the way. But I have noticed that during the most troublesome times in my life, there is only one set of footprints. I do not understand why You'd leave me when I needed You the most."

The LORD replied, "My precious, precious child, I love and I would never leave you. During your times of trial and suffering, when you see only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you."

ASK: What is a soul?

READ: Quotes from *The Simpsons, Season Seven, "Bart Sells His Soul"*

Bart: *You shank! How could you tell on me?*

Milhouse: *Well I don't want hungry birds pecking my soul forever.*

Bart: *Soul? Come on, Milhouse, there is no such thing as a soul. It's just something they made up to scare kids, like the bogeyman....*

ASK: Is Bart Simpson right? Or is a soul something more?

ASK: What is your picture of Heaven and Hell?

PLAY *Simpsons DVD clip (Season 4, DVD 1, Homer the Heretic, Track 6)*
This is where Homer "walks with God" (a very short clip).

ASK: What do you think? Is this what heaven looks like?

ACTIVITY: Divide them into two groups and make a map of “Heaven” & “Hell”
*One group must show what “Hollywood” has as “Heaven and Hell”, and one what Heaven and Hell **truly is***

After the presentations...

TELL them that “Heaven” and “Hell” are “states of being”.

ASK: What does that mean?

TELL them that Heaven = close to God, in communion with Him; however, Hell = far away from God because we chose that road. *(it's not a big place where it's all white, with God having big sandals, and the devil is always in red with a pitchfork, etc.)*

TELL them when people pass away, they “go” to either place because we believe in what Jesus told us.

READ John 5:24-30 *(this is the funeral Gospel)*

The Lord said to those Jews which had come to him: Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes him who sent me, has eternal life; he does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life. Truly, truly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life 'in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself, and has given him the authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of man. **Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment.** I can do nothing on my own authority; as I hear, I judge; and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me.



ASK: Should we fear death?

Any other questions about “death” should be asked here, and then conclude with a Trisagion in English. Ask the Youth to write the names of their dearly departed.

The reason for putting the “Trisagion” is so that they may both familiarize themselves with the service, as well as having an opportunity to pray for their dearly departed. After talking about death all day, they might want to do this to bring closure to a very interesting day.



Retreat 3: Prayer: From the "High-Priestly Prayer" to our prayers

WE MUST ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

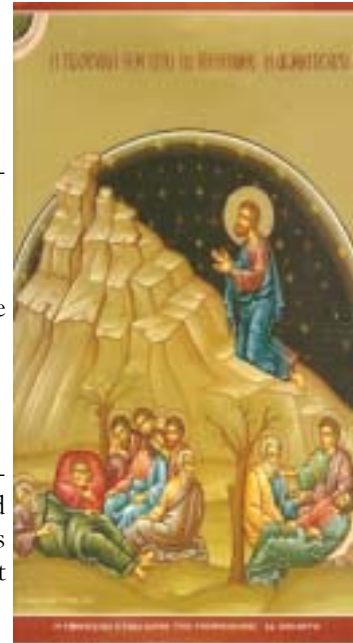
- ✦ What is prayer?
 - ✦ Why did Jesus pray?
 - ✦ How does prayer get us closer to God?
 - ✦ Different prayers: Liturgical and personal (their differences and similarities)
- How do we pray?

Media we can use to illustrate this point: Bruce Almighty (him praying at the end of the movie),

The Passion or the Gospel of John (for the Αρχιερατική Προσευχή).

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Opening Prayer by all : O Christ the true light, who enlightens and sanctifies everyone who comes into the world, may the light of your countenance be signed upon us, that in it we may see your unapproachable light; and direct our steps to the doing of your commandments; at the intercessions of your all-most pure Mother and of all your Saints. Amen.



ASK: What ways do you communicate?

DISCUSS: The pros and cons of MSN (if they don't mention this, please mention MSN...)

ASK: What is prayer? (*Make sure they give you the answer "Communication". With that...*)

TELL them that prayer is like "MSN-ing" God...having a communication with Him.

PLAY: The Passion (Track 1) or The Gospel of John (DVD 2, Track 8)

**This is the clip of the Hierarchical Prayer of Christ.*

PLAY: Bruce Almighty (Track 18): "Now, that's a prayer."

ACTIVITY: Divide the youth in three groups. One group will write a poem, another will create a tableau, and the last will paint a picture *on what "Prayer" is* (Allow 10 minutes for prep time)

When the groups present, comment on each particular artistic expression

STATE: Prayer is communication with God, and *Frequent Prayer = better communication with God*. STATE: Even the disciples didn't know how exactly to pray, or were looking for a better way to pray ("Lord, teach us to pray"). How can we pray?

ACTIVITY: Get sticky notes and put stuff that they usually pray for. (2-3 minutes)

Pick at random the prayers and DISCUSS as a group if it's a "good prayer"

ASK: Is prayer only limited to "prayers of Church?"

DISCUSS the differences and similarities between liturgical and personal prayers

FINAL ACTIVITY: Ask them, in groups of 3-4, to make up a prayer about the following topics:

- School
- Family
- Friends
- The Church (i.e. the community of believers)
- Poor and Rich
- Hungry and Filled
- Thanksgiving for Life
- When they travel
- For the Departed .

Comment on all of the previous prayers, and finish off with this prayer: **Into Your hands, O Lord Jesus Christ, I commit my spirit and body to You. Bless me, sanctify me, make my heart Your throne. Teach me to pray. Amen.**



Retreat 4: «Γεύσασθε και Ἴδετε »/“Taste and See”: Holy Communion’s origins & importance

WE MUST ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

- ✦ What is Holy Communion?
 - ✦ List Images of Holy Communion (Meal at Sea of Tiberius, Cana, “Bread of Life”, etc.)
 - ✦ Why is it important?
 - ✦ How often should we go for Holy Communion?
 - ✦ What is the “epiclesis of the Holy Spirit”?
- How do we prepare for Holy Communion?



Media we can use to illustrate this point: Gospel of John *or* The Passion (*the Last Supper scene*).

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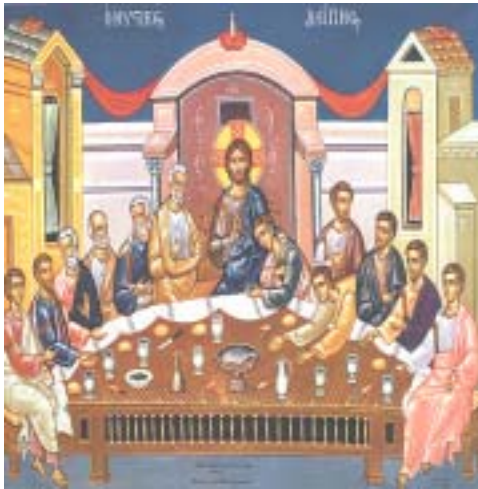
As it is outlined in the cover letter, we request that a meal be served to the Youth attending the retreat. This fits in perfectly with this retreat. Serve the meal, having all the Youth around one table or various tables close making a circle. After giving ample time to finish brunch, you may begin from the centre.

DEFINE: “Community”. Bring up the concepts of *friendship, togetherness, similar practices, etc.*

ASK: What does Holy Communion remind you of? (*Concepts and images*)

Remember to state the images of Holy Communion at the Sea of Tiberius, Cana, etc. (You can use [The Gospel of John](#) to illustrate these points – DVD 2, Track 13 and DVD 1, Track 3 respectively).

At this point, tell them to go to different stations set up in your Church (or wherever the retreat is being held). The 4 centres should be as follows:



Centre 1: Importance of Holy Communion

This centre should include a list of why Holy Communion is important. You can ask the Youth to do this privately (at home, in Sunday School, etc.), and to submit it to you a few days before the retreat (by e-mail, at Church, etc.). Post their answers, and get them to read each others’ answers at the retreat. You can have what each Gospel and Church Father says about Holy Communion. If done in Church, this can be done in the Narthex.

Centre 2: How Often for Holy Communion

This centre is just a “fact-finding mission”; that is, it is a way to find out how often they think they should receive Holy Communion. Ask them to fill out a sticky note, telling you how often they should go and why they think this. Discuss the results with them towards the end. If they said “once or twice a year”, tell them about St. Basil the Great (who received Holy Communion four times a week!). Tell them that the main purpose of the Divine Liturgy is for the faithful to go for Holy Communion. Repeat the words of Christ to them: “He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood, I will dwell in them, and them in Me”. (Jn. 6:56) If done in the Church, this can be done in the Nave.

Centre 3: The Epiclesis of the Holy Spirit

If this is done in Church, please make sure that a "Table of Offering" is set up outside the Altar. Have this presentation next to this table.

Use the Divine Liturgy video of the Metropolis to show the Anaphora. You can tell them that this is the part of the Liturgy when the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ.

ASK: Who is the Holy Spirit? How has He manifested Himself to us in the past? How do we experience His Grace?

DISCUSS the following phrase: "True or false: When we commune, God makes our soul His throne." How and why?

Also briefly discuss the Table of Offering and its importance. For more information on the Table of Offering, please go to the end of this presentation.

Centre 4: Preparation

Have this centre on the other side of the Nave, if you are doing this in Church.

Put the words "fasting", "confession", and "forgiving your neighbor" on chart paper. Ask them to all go up in teams, so they can say *if and why* we need to do each to receive Holy Communion. Present them to the group, discussing with all.

After this is done, go back to the centre and ...

STATE: OK...*so we've talked about Community, Holy Communion, and other things. You can see how it's like we are one Family in Jesus Christ.*

ASK: "Now, how about if someone insulted your family? How about if someone insulted your friends? How about if someone insulted your God?"

Get answers from the Youth and discuss this with them people "insulting God".

Go through everything discussed today, and make sure they have an opportunity to ask final questions.

Final Prayer by all: Receive me, today, Son of God, as a partaker of Your Mystical Supper. I will not reveal Your mystery to Your adversaries. Nor will I give you a kiss as did Judas. But, as the thief, I confess to You: Lord, remember me in Your Kingdom. Amen.

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For more information on the Table of Offering, please go to the following links: www.oca.org/OCchapter.asp?SID=2&ID=91 and www.goarch.org/en/ourfaith/articles/article7077.asp

HOPE AND JOY ACTIVITY:

The Exodus and the Resurrection

The purpose of this activity is to illustrate to the children, in a very simple way, the connection of the Exodus and the Resurrection of Christ. It should be planned as a two-week event. After serving the children a Lenten snack, tell them about the events of the sessions, respectively.

Session 1 is about the Exodus of Moses. For this session, you may use the movie *The Prince of Egypt*. Familiarize the children with the characters of the movie (such as Moses, the Pharaoh, Zipporah, Aaron, and the “Burning Bush” (i.e. God). For the youngest of the group, you can have pictures for them to color, in order to have a connection with the characters. Tell them briefly of Moses’ early life, his stay at the palace, his leaving Egypt, and God’s plan of salvation for the Jewish people still in Egypt through him. Make sure your main message is deliverance from bondage into the Promised Land and God loves everyone who will accept Him.

Watch *The Prince of Egypt* and then ask them what they understood and finish with a prayer.

Session 2 is a time for the kids to familiarize themselves about the different events of Holy Week. Separate them into the following categories: The Last Supper; The Trials of Jesus; Crucifixion and Death of Jesus; and The Resurrection of Jesus. Ask them to familiarize the other children there with the characters of their category (such as Jesus, the disciples, Judas, Pilate, the Chief Priests, the Myrrh-bearing women, and the Angel at the tomb).

Upon completing this, tell them the similarities and differences between Moses and Jesus:

Moses and the Exodus	Jesus and the Resurrection
Escaped from Pharaoh’s killing the little children of Egypt	Escaped from Herod’s killing the little children of Bethlehem
“Send a shepherd to...deliver us to the promised land...” = He was a shepherd for his people, Israel	Jesus is the Shepherd guiding the Church
Moses didn’t like Jews before knowing the Truth; he loved God & the Jews after finding out the Truth	Jesus loved everyone (even His enemies)
Moses found out later in life that he was Jewish	Jesus knew from the beginning that He is the Son of God
Water brings life: Moses with his separating the Red Sea stopped Egyptians from killing the Jews	Baptism brings life to us, as Christians, and makes us part of the Mystical Body of Christ
Jethro = High Priest of Midian	Jesus = Great High Priest (of the Church)
Moses saw God	Jesus is God
Moses stopped Egyptian from beating Jew	Jesus stopped money-changers from taking advantage of other Jews
God said He’ll be with Moses	Jesus says God will be with us all
Moses brings freedom to his people via. God	Jesus (who Is God) brings freedom to all
People who didn’t want to believe in God’s message: 2 ‘priests’ of Egyptians’ and Pharaoh	People who crucified Jesus (Chief priests, etc.)
Pride and Stubbornness = Pharaoh	Chief Priests, Sadducees, etc.
Jews enslaved by Egyptians	Jews enslaved by Romans
1 st Passover = Moses	Jesus is our eternal Passover
Blood on door = accepting God	Holy Communion = accepting God
Miracles: Angel of death, plagues, fire tower, parting the Red Sea, etc.	Jesus’ Miracles

Finish off with a prayer, and wish them all a “Καλή Ανάσταση”.