

KOINONIA:

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The Laver of Regeneration By Archpriest Eric G. Tosi

“O Lord our God, who dwells on high and regards the humble of heart, who has sent forth as the salvation of the race of men, Thine only-begotten Son and God our Lord Jesus Christ: look down upon Thy servants the catechumens, who have bowed their necks before Thee; make them worthy in due time of the laver of regeneration, the remission of sins, and the robe of incorruption. Unite them to Thy Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, and number them with Thy chosen flock.”

– *Divine Liturgy, Litany of the Catechumens*

When I was a young priest, we had a clergy meeting for the Diocese. This bishop, of blessed memory, exhorted all of the clergy to include the Litany of Catechumens in the Liturgy. He made the comment that if we do not pray for catechumens then God will not send them. It was our duty to pray to God to send us new catechumens. Since I began doing this, there has never been a time in my parish



priesthood that I did not have a catechumen (often multiple) in the parish. And just when I think that I am done with a group, a new set arrives. This can only be understood as by praying for them, God sends them.

We live in a remarkable time with many of our parishes experiencing an influx of persons interested in the Orthodox Church. We must seize this moment as an opportunity from God, for we have been praying that He would send them to us. And how we receive them into the Church is just as critical as God sending them (see *Matthew 23:15*). Our main challenge is to

ensure that we are bringing solid Christians into the Orthodox Church.

Over the year, we will explore the principles of catechism, the incredible work that has been done in the past and is currently being done. Every parish should receive catechumens as a gift and consider how best to lead them to Christ, instruct them in the faith, integrate them into the life of the Holy Orthodox Church, and, above all, help them become true Christians in the world.

There are many approaches and many people have very entrenched views about how to best accomplish this task. That is fine, but we should be warned that if everything is not done with love—love for Christ, love for the Church, and love for the person—then it will be for naught. As St. Cyril of Jerusalem states in his Catechesis: *“to them that love God, all things work together for good.”* May it so be blessed in our efforts and may God send us many catechumens.

Instructions to New Catechumens

By Saint Cyril of Jerusalem

“See, I pray you, how great a dignity Jesus bestows on you. You were called a Catechumen, while the word echoed round you from without; hearing of hope, and knowing it not; hearing mysteries, and not understanding them; hearing Scriptures, and not knowing their depth. The echo is no longer around you, but within you ...”

Already, there is an odor of blessedness upon you, O you who are soon to be enlightened. Already, you are gathering the spiritual flowers, to weave heavenly crowns. Already, the fragrance of the Holy Spirit has breathed upon you. Already, you have gathered round the vestibule of the King's palace. May you be led in also by the King! For blossoms now have appeared upon the trees; may the fruit also be found perfect! Thus far there has been an inscription of your names, and a call to service, and torches of the bridal train, and a longing for heavenly citizenship, and a good purpose, and hope attendant thereon. For he lies not who said, *“that to them that love God all things work together for good [...]”* God is lavish in beneficence, yet He waits for each man's genuine will: therefore, the Apostle added and said, *“to them that are called according to a purpose.”* The honesty of purpose makes you called: for if your body be here but not your mind, it profits you nothing.

Even Simon Magus once came to the Laver. He was baptized but was not enlightened, and though he dipped his body in water, he enlightened not his heart with the Spirit. His body went down and came up, but his soul was not buried with Christ, nor raised with Him. Now, I mention the statements of



(men's) falls that you may not fall—for these things happened to them by way of example, and they are written for the admonition of those who to this day draw near. Let none of you be found tempting His grace, lest any root of bitterness spring up and trouble you. Let none of you enter saying, *“Let us see what the faithful are doing. Let me go in and see, that I may learn what is being done.”* Do you expect to see, and not expect to be seen? And do you think that while you are searching out what is going on, God is not searching your heart? [...]

See, I pray you, how great a dignity Jesus bestows on you. You were called a Catechumen, while the word echoed round you from without; hearing of hope, and knowing it not; hearing mysteries, and not understanding them; hearing

Scriptures, and not knowing their depth. The echo is no longer around you, but within you; for the indwelling Spirit henceforth makes your mind a house of God. When you shall have heard what is written concerning the mysteries, then will you understand things which thou knew not. And think not that you receive a small thing. Though a miserable man, you receive one of God's titles. Hear St. Paul saying, *“God is faithful.”* Hear another Scripture saying, *“God is faithful and just.”* Foreseeing this, the Psalmist—because men are to receive a title of God—spoke thus in the person of God: I said, *“You are gods, and are all sons of the Most High.”* But beware lest thou have the title of *faithful*, but the will of the *faithless*. You have entered into a contest, toil on through the race. Another such opportunity you cannot have. Were it your wedding day before you, would you not have disregarded all else, and set about the preparation for the feast? And on the eve of consecrating your soul to the heavenly Bridegroom, will you not cease from carnal things, that you may win spiritual?

From the Prologue of St. Cyril of Jerusalem's Catechetical Lectures.
<https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3101.htm>

Our Continual Mistake

By Archpriest Alexander Elchaninov

Our continual mistake is that we do not concentrate upon the present day, the actual hour, of our life; we live in the past or in the future; we are continually expecting the coming of some special moment when our life will unfold itself in its full significance. And we do not notice that life is flowing like water through our fingers, sifting like precious grain from a loosely fastened bag.

Constantly, each day, each hour, God is send-

ing us people, circumstances, and tasks which should mark the beginning of our renewal; yet we pay them no attention, and thus continually we resist God's will for us. Indeed, how can God help us? Only by sending us in our daily life certain people, and certain coincidences of circumstance. If we accepted every hour of our life as the hour of God's will for us, as the decisive, most important, unique hour of our life—what sources of joy, love, strength, as yet

hidden from us, would spring from the depths of our soul!

Let us then be serious in our attitude towards each person we meet in our life, towards every opportunity of performing a good deed; be sure that you will then fulfil God's will for you in these very circumstances, on that very day, in that very hour.

From Alexander Elchaninov's Diary of a Russian Priest (SVS Press, 1982), p. 157.

“Constantly, each day, each hour, God is sending us people, circumstances, tasks, which should mark the beginning of our renewal...”

Four Questions

By Protopresbyter John Meyendorff

Is our liturgical life meaningful enough to be shared with newcomers? Or is it functioning only in terms of providing comfort and satisfaction to our present membership (a fully legitimate, but insufficient concern)?

Have we ever noticed that our Divine Liturgy contains petitions for the “catechumens,” i.e., the new converts who attend the services without yet enjoying the full membership in the Church?

And if there are no catechumens in our parish, this may mean that we do not really care for the mission of the Church.

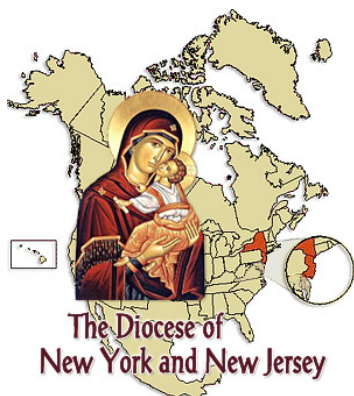
Is our own behavior, as Orthodox Christians, really different from the behavior of those who make no such claim, and are we frankly accepting the patterns of an increasingly secular civilization (which we verbally condemn as Godless)?

But some basic questions

are to be asked from those who speak of mission and are actively involved in implementing it:

Do you always remember Christ's warning to the pharisees who “*traverse sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, make him twice a child of hell as themselves?*” (Matthew 23:15), or St. Seraphim's appeal: “*Save yourself and thousands will be saved around you?*”

“If there are no catechumens in our parish, this may mean that we do not really care for the missions of the Church.”



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Talking with Soldiers

By Subdeacon Stephen Turner

The mission of Saint John the Soldier has been around since the fall of 2023, and for the first half of our history, we attracted very few young men as catechumens/inquirers. This was mainly due to a lack of advertising and social media visibility. This began to change about eighteen months ago for a couple of reasons. Since that time, we have seen several dozen young men come and go at various stages of catechesis and church membership. In this time, we have moved from young men who find us towards the end of their time at Ft. Drum, NY, to them finding us when they arrive. Another change we are seeing is young men with wives and families. Our demographics are odd, too, as most of the parish is 30 and younger, and we only have one adult who is cradle Orthodox, and she is also the only person who has been Orthodox for longer than 5 years in the parish.

So, what does catechesis look like here at Saint John the Soldier? A lot like everywhere, but tailored to our community's situation. Another factor is the weather. Here in the North Country, just off Lake Ontario, winters can be interesting. Being snowed in, travel bans, and hazardous conditions are quite normal



for us. In our cycle of services, I do a short Sunday School immediately following our reader's hours and typica on Sundays. We also meet online once a week for a more formal catechism class; however, this is sparsely attended, as is our weekday class when it is in person, summer and fall. When we can meet, the focus is very much on how to live Orthodox, how to function in the church, and, as we are a priest-less mission, how to conduct reader's services. Our goal is to equip our parishioners with the ability to conduct reader's services, whether deployed, snowed in, or stationed somewhere without an Orthodox church, and if need be, help plant one.

One technique or tool that has been very useful in our situation has been Discord, a popular communication app.

We make use of it as our primary means of parish communication, and it supports catechism and adult ed in a variety of ways. We have sections for coffee hour, general conversation, children's education, catechism, prayer requests, etc. Additionally, you can use it for voice chat, streaming classes, or services. We need to be creative.

The North Country faces seasonal challenges of extreme snow and cold, and serving a primarily military community, which is always on the move, brings its own challenges; and we are trying to meet them as best we can through a mix of in-person and online activities, classes, cooking experiences, and travel or pilgrimage to other parishes in the area. We gratefully ask for continued prayers from our diocesan family and our patron, Saint John the Soldier.