

HOW TO RAISE AN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN, AND, POSSIBLY, A SAINT

A POSITIVE RESPONSE TO THE HOUSTON POLICE DEPARTMENT
BY BISHOP ALEXANDAR OF THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

- 1) When the child is yet young, begin to train him/her in sympathy and consideration for others and in unselfishness. By these means he/she will grow up to understand that the material things of this world are not the most important things for Orthodox Christians. Your life-style and example will be the greatest influence on your child in this matter.
- 2) Teach your child how to chant the psalms and the hymns of the Church. This will encourage him or her to learn to love the holy services, and to reject the foul language and immodest songs that are so widespread today in our society. Your example in this will have the greatest influence on your child.
- 3) Never cease from finding occasions to train your child in spiritual matters and in the love of God and others, and always bring them to the Church. When we were small, we were never asked "if" we were coming to church - or anywhere else, for that matter. The fact that we were going to church was a foregone conclusion. Your child must learn this from the very earliest years. If you wait until your child reaches adolescence, it will already be far too late.
- 4) Teach your child the meaning of the words "right" and "wrong," "sin" and "virtue," "truth" and "falsehood" ; also teach your child to know the Church's Faith, and to recognize erroneous belief. In this manner, your child's understanding and spiritual discretion will grow as the years go by, and he/she will be prepared for the future, even if he/she has to endure hate and persecution for his/her convictions.
- 5) Give your child spiritual duties appropriate to his/her age and understanding. These could include such activities as reading the *Lives of the Saints* written for your child's level, or reciting some of the evening prayers together with the rest of the family, or fasting and making prostrations, or helping out in church if he or she is old enough.
- 6) Aside from providing your child with plenty of Orthodox spiritual literature appropriate for his/her age, make sure that material of an impure or inappropriate nature is not in your home. Unfortunately, today this includes most of television programming. Remember: whatever goes in, comes out. Your example in this matter will have the greatest influence on your child.
- 7) Your own life-style, your personal tastes, your words, the books you read, the music you listen to, and the things that draw your interest and attention will all speak louder to your child than anything else. Hallow your child's eyes with the holy icons. Sanctify his hearing with the holy hymns, his sense of smell with sacred incense, and his entire body and soul with the holy Mysteries. If your home is a haven of spiritual sanity, love, and peace, your child will know where to turn when he or she inevitably encounters the blasphemous, shocking, and sordid things that fill our society. Teach your child the Jesus Prayer. In connection with this last matter, I remember the following story:

Some twenty years ago, on the Greek island of Oinoussae, which lies opposite the large Aegean island of Chios, there was a married priest who served the spiritual and liturgical needs of the sacred Convent of the Annunciation there. This clergyman had four or five children, and every morning he lined them up for a "review." He interrogated them to learn if they had, upon arising from bed, made the sign of the cross, said their prayers, washed their faces, brushed their teeth, scrubbed behind their ears, and dressed nicely and appropriately. Then he would wave his prayer rope in front of them and ask "And now, children, what is this?" Holding their prayer ropes in their hands, the children would lift them in a salute, and cry aloud "Our weapons!"

8) Instruct your child in almsgiving and compassion towards those who are in need. And teach them also that they should help in house duties and, if they are old enough, that they should labor at various odd jobs, so that they may learn from an early age that, as the Holy Apostle Paul tells us, one who does not labor should not eat. Idleness and affluence together have, in our society, destroyed countless young people and led them into sin and even an early death. Never be ashamed to say to your child: "We can't afford it."

9) Teach your child by your own example - and by the examples found in the Holy Scriptures and the *Lives of the Saints* - that abstinence from food and drink and personal comforts is a noble and beautiful thing, taught to us by our Saviour Himself and by the Saints. Aside from being good for our souls, austerity is also good for our little planet. Whenever I visit our parish of Saint Nectarios in Seattle, there is Divine Liturgy every day. After the service on weekdays, a group of us usually go to a nearby restaurant to have a cup of coffee, a muffin, etc. Over the years, the waitresses have learned about our fast days - "Oh, okay, it's one of those days," they say, when our orders are particularly small. "Yes," I reply, "it's a Low Environmental Impact Day."

10) Be fair if it should ever happen that your child gets into a dispute with another child, or with teachers, or with other authorities. If your child is wrong, he/she is wrong, and show him/her, together with your love and support, why he/she is wrong. Your child will learn something of God's justice from your example.

11) As the years pass, if you persist faithfully in these matters, as you must, you will discover, much to your surprise, that you have grown spiritually also. Saint Paul was quite serious when he said that "a woman shall be saved by childbearing"-and we know and understand that, especially in a society such as ours, both parents are essential for the proper kind of Orthodox Christian spiritual nurturing that is needed.

12) Prepare yourself for a life of spiritual struggles and prayers. You and your children will need them and the grace of God, for we are not living in the world as God originally created it. We are living in occupied territory-a land occupied by the enemy. But, by our holy Faith and God's grace, we are nonetheless a free people, living in hope and expectation of our deliverance in our true and everlasting country. And if we are heedful in these matters, we will have the boldness to say to our Saviour in that last day, "Behold me, your servant, and the children which Thou hast given me."