

2006 St. John the Wonderworker Family Camp

The Gospel of John tells us that Christ prays to the Father, “not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.” (John 17: 15-17). As Christians, we strive to acquire the Grace of God so that, with God’s Grace, we may fulfill the promise of the Resurrection and achieve the sanctification about which Christ speaks. As Orthodox Christians, we receive invaluable tools that help us to achieve this goal. Foremost among them is the gift of the sacraments, through which we directly experience Divine Grace. Also, we have the accumulated teaching of the Holy Fathers and Mothers of the Church on spiritual warfare. Essential to spiritual warfare is detachment from the world, not so that we become lost and alienated, but so that we may attach ourselves to Christ, to “put on Christ” and partake of His love. When Christians do this, they become united in God’s love with co-strugglers and likeminded lovers of God. Those who do this compose the Body of Christ, called the Church (1 Cor. 12:12, Col. 1:18).

The Church always exists as a refuge from the world, with its myriad distractions pulling us away from attentiveness to Christ. The Church offers us the sacraments and Divine services that orient our spirits to Christ and through which God bestows His Grace. However, even though each parish church functions as an ark, preserving us from the tempest-tossed sea of life, the need for pilgrimage has always been recognized as an important means to acquire Grace. One purpose of pilgrimage is to pray before Holy Relics. However, another important part of pilgrimage is for the Christian to temporarily

become an exile from the world, to pray daily in monasteries and churches, and to renew one's enthusiasm for the spiritual life.

Many members of St. John's routinely go on pilgrimage. However, it is often difficult for families to travel the long distances required for pilgrimage in America. In the spirit of temporarily exiling ourselves from the world and coming together—as a parish—to pray, break bread, and recreate in common, St. John's has sponsored annual “Family Camps,” beginning with our first one in 2000. The second week of August this year, St. John's hosted our fourth such retreat, encouraging Orthodox Christians from the West Coast to join us in fellowship, “continuing daily with one accord in the temple” (Acts 2: 46). It was a blessed time to retreat from the world, to “not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds” (Romans 12: 2).

The 2006 Camp, whose theme was “Standing Together For the Faith of the Gospel” was held at the Springfield Kiwanis Youth Camp, a change of location from the three previous ones at Camp Lane. The location, nestled on Fall Creek and featuring woodland paths, an expansive grassy field, swimming beach, and the large Mooney Lodge, was easily transformed into both temple and trapeza for four days. Who would have thought that the home of the Kiwanis could so easily take on the atmosphere of Grace we normally associate with monastic pilgrimages?

There seemed to be unanimous approval of the new location, but the real treasure was the common life in Christ. With an array of activities for children and adults alike, each day was anchored by our common prayer cycle, including a morning Matins and an evening Vespers, and our common meals, which featured spiritual reading. Pilgrims stayed either in cabins or tents. People who could not come out for the whole four days

came out for a night or two to hear some of the talks, but the experience of staying out there for the entire retreat was irreplaceable.

While the children rehearsed their skits for the Wednesday evening talent show, learned how to make candles, mounted icons, played volleyball, went swimming and were treated to special classes and Q & A sessions on the faith, the adults enriched their understanding of the faith in the classes of our two guests, Hiermonk Damascene of St. Herman of Alaska's Monastery in Platina, California and Archpriest Fr. Michael Oyer of Holy Dormition Church in Santa Rosa, California.

Hiermonk Damascene began the series of classes Sunday night at St. John Maximovitch's in Eugene with a well-received talk comparing the Protestant and Patristic versions of Creation. The classes continued at the SKY Camp with Fr. Damascene giving us a rare glimpse into the missionary Orthodox presence in China. Tuesday and Wednesday afternoon, Fr. Michael delivered a talk on the Family Retreat's theme of "Standing Together For the Faith of the Gospel." Wednesday evening, Fr. Damascene delivered a slide show of his recent pilgrimage to Russia, Greece, and Serbia. He complete his series of talks with an additional presentation on Creation on Wednesday morning. The talks were well received and we are appreciative of the speakers' efforts to come out and share their learning and experiences with us. Fr. Michael's talk was part of "The St. Paisius Missionary School," a traveling 'school' of speakers that helps "awaken in newly converted American Orthodox Christians a zeal to live the traditional Orthodox way of life" (see <http://www.stpaisius.org/> for more information). Fr. Michael has delivered talks at our previous Family Camps. Fr. Damascene has visited our parish a

number of times in the past, but this was his first visit to a Family Camp. He enjoyed the experience and promises to return in the future.

The talent show Wednesday evening was a roaring success. Have the lives of saints ever been presented in such a memorable way? Everybody was a star shining bright that night! Pilgrims drifted away Thursday morning, returning to the world enriched in mind and spirit. The members of St. John's parish host the Family Camp. A number of people worked very hard so that we had such delicious meals to share, speakers to learn from, and activities for children and adults alike. We plan on hosting another Family Camp in 2007 and we encourage everybody to look to work schedules and calendars in advance so that you can join us next year. For, as our Lord tells us, "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them" (Matt. 18: 20). For those who missed Fr. Damascene's talks on Creation or his pilgrimage, or who would like a video of the talent show, contact Daniel (dmackay@uoregon.edu) to see about getting a DVD. Contact Seraphim (xxxxx@hotmail.com) for an audio CD of either of Fr. Michael's talks. Neither recordings are for distribution outside of our church or the families of those who attended the family camp.