



2023 TOPIC TIPS & RESOURCES



DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (DRE)
GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AMERICA



ABOUT THE ORATORICAL FESTIVAL

The St. John Chrysostom Oratorical Festival is a nationwide program of the Department of Religious Education (DRE) of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, where Orthodox youth present speeches discussing the Greek Orthodox faith and the Church.

Youth get to explore and deepen their faith and hone their speech writing and public speaking skills. Finalists can earn sizeable awards and scholarships at the National Finals. And finalists can also earn scholarships at each of the three levels.

The Oratorical Festival centers around faith, education, and fellowship.



ABOUT **TOPIC TIPS & RESOURCES**

This document includes a bibliography with expansive resources such as books, articles, videos, websites, and liturgical documents. As well as suggestions, things to ponder, and questions on each topic to assist participants in brainstorming, developing, and writing their Oratorical Festival speeches.

The tips provide tools for parents, mentors, and GOYA advisors to assist participants on the vast range of topics with ease and confidence. Sunday School teachers can also guide their students through a discussion on any of the topics, and even turn a class into a writing session to encourage all youth to participate in their Church Oratorical Festival.

HOW IT WORKS **THE ORATORICAL FESTIVAL**

The Oratorical Festival is divided into the Senior Division (grades 10-12) and Junior Division (grades 7-9). Participants start at the Parish level, which begins in the new year. Then proceed to the District or Metropolis level. And then, two finalists representing each Metropolis of the Archdiocese advance to the National Finals, which are on June 9-11, 2023, and hosted by the Metropolis of New Jersey at St. George Greek Orthodox Church in Clifton.

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

Everything participants need to know about eligibility, speech requirements, and guidelines can be found in the Oratorical Festival Manual under the Participant Information section: www.goarch.org/en/oratorical

AWARDS & SCHOLARSHIPS

All participants at the National Finals will receive awards from the St. John Chrysostom Oratorical Festival Scholarship Fund ranging from \$500 to \$2000 and the FAITH: An Endowment for Orthodoxy and Hellenism Scholarships (to be announced). Finalists at any level are eligible to receive the Chrysostom Scholarship to Hellenic College ranging from \$2,500 to \$30,000 per year.

SENIOR DIVISION

(GRADES 10-12)

Select one of the five following topics:

TOPIC 1

The Ecumenical Patriarchate in Constantinople is the highest seat and the Mother Church of Orthodox Christians. The Ecumenical Patriarch is the spiritual leader of 300 million Orthodox Christians worldwide. Discuss how the Patriarchate has been a symbol of unity, a source of missionary growth, an advocate of dialogue among Christians, and a defender of the historical Orthodox Faith.

Here are a few suggested ways you could research and develop your speech:

- A.** The Patriarchate is the highest seat and holiest center of the Orthodox Christian Church throughout the world. It spans centuries, having retained Constantinople as its seat. According to tradition, the Church there was founded by Saint Andrew, the “first called” of Christ’s Apostles. It was there also that the Nicene Creed was first composed, and the Canon of the New Testament was approved. Explain the significance of the Ecumenical Patriarchate for the establishment of the framework of Christianity.
- B.** The 36th Canon of the Sixth Ecumenical Council, held in Constantinople in the year 680, confirmed the primacy of the Ecumenical Patriarch, paving the way for his administrative jurisdiction and pastoral leadership. Give some examples of how this has been exercised in the history of global Orthodoxy.
- C.** The Ecumenical Patriarchate has been a source of global missionary activity for over 1,500 years. For example, the evangelization of the Slavs through Saints Cyril and Methodius was an initiative of the Patriarchate. Discuss some of those missionary endeavors and their present-day results.
- D.** The current Ecumenical Patriarch, His All-Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew (born Demetrius Archondonis in 1940 on the island of Imvros), was elected the 270th successor of Saint Andrew. Discuss how He has affirmed the legitimate involvement of the Orthodox Church in the ecumenical dialogue, while at the same time preserving the Orthodox Tradition and opposing efforts at proselytism in Orthodox territory.
- E.** The Ecumenical Patriarchate has emphasized the importance of working towards unity, especially among the churches that are rooted in and draw their lines from the Apostolic faith and find their center in the Holy Eucharist. The Ecumenical Patriarch has spoken both of the need to affirm the historical faith of the Church and of the need to seek reconciliation among churches and peoples who have been divided by cultural, political, and linguistic factors. Discuss some of the accomplishments in recent decades to increase mutual understanding and to address historical reasons for the divisions.

Here are some resources you can explore as you do your research:

- A.** The Order of St. Andrew the Apostle has several resources at: www.archons.org
As well as on their YouTube Channel such as: First Among Equals - Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew: www.youtube.com/watch?v=5rtyZ5glkTk
- B.** A guidebook of historical information: *The Ecumenical Patriarchate Today: Sacred Greek Orthodox Sites of Istanbul* by Rev. Dn. John Chryssavgis:
www.amazon.com/Ecumenical-Patriarchate-Today-Orthodox-Istanbul/dp/6058517400/ref=sr_1_2?crid=38RRHV2L41MOU&keywords=ecumenical+patriarchate&qid=1664560266&qu=eyJxc2MiOilwLjAwliwicXNhIjoiMC4wMCIslInFzcCl6IjAuMDAifQ==&s=books&sprefix=ecumenical+patriarchate,stripbooks,60&sr=1-2
- C.** Content regarding ecumenical relations and some primary source documents:
The Ecumenical Patriarchate and Christian Unity by Rev. Fr. Thomas FitzGerald:
www.amazon.com/Ecumenical-Patriarchate-Christian-Unity-Expanded/dp/1885652151/ref=sr_1_5?crid=38RRHV2L41MOU&keywords=ecumenical+patriarchate&qid=1664560266&qu=eyJxc2MiOilwLjAwliwicXNhIjoiMC4wMCIslInFzcCl6IjAuMDAifQ==&s=books&sprefix=ecumenical+patriarchate,stripbooks,60&sr=1-5
- D.** *In the World, Yet Not of the World: Social and Global Initiatives of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew (Orthodox Christianity and Contemporary Thought)* by His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew: www.amazon.com/World-Yet-Not-Christianity-Contemporary/dp/0823231712
- E.** A brief FAQ (frequently asked questions) about the Ecumenical Patriarch from the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America: www.goarch.org/-/faq-ecumenical-patriarch
- F.** Documents from and articles about the Ecumenical Patriarchate from the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America: www.goarch.org/news/patriarchate
- G.** *First Among Equals: The Ecumenical Patriarchate Zine* by the Department of Religious Education of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese Of America: <https://orthodoxmarketplace.com/first-among-equals-the-ecumenical-patriarchate-zine-student/>

TOPIC 2

During times of crisis, our faith is tested. How are Orthodox Christians taught to understand and manage pain and suffering?

Here are a few suggested ways you could research and develop your speech:

- A.** Consider the different approaches people take to the issue of suffering. Possible responses to suffering include discouragement, despair, resentment, and bitterness, or, on the other hand, hope, resilience through grace, learning, and spiritual development. What approach does Christ teach us to take?
- B.** Consider the Biblical texts that relate to suffering in the context of faith, hope, and love. For example, read the Epistle of 1 Peter and summarize all of the verses that speak of suffering and the different issues associated with it; or, passages like Romans 5, Romans 8, 2 Corinthians 1, and the Gospel accounts of the passion of the Lord Jesus.
- C.** Discuss in what ways suffering can be redemptive – not in and of itself, but in the context of union with Christ, spiritual growth, and dependence on the grace of God through the Holy Spirit.
- D.** Summarize Saint John Chrysostom's argument (in *No One Can Harm the Man Who Does Not Harm Himself*). How does understanding eternal realities help us understand the temporality of present sufferings?
- E.** Discuss some practical approaches that can be taken to help manage pain and suffering. For example, what is the role of prayer, the sacramental life, and Church fellowship?

Here are some resources you can explore as you do your research:

- A.** An interview with Metropolitan Anthony Bloom where he discusses how Christ teaches us to face suffering, and in what ways it can be transformative: Metropolitan Anthony Bloom - Interview on the CBC - On Suffering: www.youtube.com/watch?v=l2OtD5OkHHo
- B.** Saint John Chrysostom's treatise *No One Can Harm the Man Who Does Not Harm Himself* has a profound approach to what ultimate suffering is (i.e., separation from God), how present sufferings can be put into their proper temporary context, and the role of faith and free will: www.newadvent.org/fathers/1902.htm
- C.** *Pain, Suffering and Resilience- Orthodox Christian Perspectives* by Rev. Fr. Stephen Muse: www.amazon.com/Suffering-Resilience-Orthodox-Christian-Perspectives/dp/1936773481/ref=sr_1_1?qid=1664562741&refinements=p_27%25253APhD+Stephen+Muse&s=books&sr=1-1&text=PhD+Stephen+Muse
- D.** *The Theology of Illness* by Jean-Claude Larchet: www.amazon.com/gp/product/0881412392/ref=dbs_a_def_rwt_hsch_vapi_taft_p1_i1
- E.** *The Meaning of Suffering and Strife & Reconciliation* by Archimandrite Seraphim Aleksiev: www.amazon.com/Suffering-Reconciliation-Spiritual-Writings-Archimandrite/dp/0938635867

TOPIC 3

The Christian message in C.S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* has influenced many believers of Christ. How has another work of fiction inspired people to seek Jesus Christ?

Here are a few suggested ways you could research and develop your speech:

- A.** For centuries authors have crafted characters that emulate one or more aspects of the life of Christ. This often takes the form of a noble character who peacefully sacrifices himself for the greater good. Choose a classic or modern work of fiction with a Christ figure and draw comparisons between the character and the Gospel accounts of Christ's life.
- B.** Fyodor Dostoevsky, arguably the most famous Orthodox novelist, explores theological themes in his writing. Choose a Dostoevsky novel and consider what it teaches about Orthodox theology.
- C.** The book *Franny and Zooey* by J. D. Salinger popularized the classic book of Orthodox spirituality, *The Way of the Pilgrim*. The Jesus Prayer is featured in the book. Would you consider its publication inspiring to Orthodox Christians? How?
- D.** C.S. Lewis was an atheist who became religious later in life and turned to fiction as a means to explore his own journey to finding Christ. Is there another author and a specific work of fiction whose characters and major plot points suggest a similar revelation?

Here are some resources you can explore as you do your research:

- A.** Books by Steinbeck (*Grapes of Wrath*) and JRR Tolkien (*Lord of the Rings*) include Christ figures, as do many other novels.
- B.** Fyodor Dostoevsky's books include *Crime and Punishment* and *The Brothers Karamazov*.
- C.** Pick a favorite book you have read for school or at home with Christian themes. The Orthodox resources you leverage for this topic will depend on the book you choose. Consider reading the Gospels to look for connections to themes and characters in the novel.

TOPIC 4

We have lived through a pandemic and emerged with deep societal divides. How can our faith in Christ heal us and take us forward together?

Here are a few suggested ways you could research and develop your speech:

- A.** Consider the following verses in scripture that encourage forgiveness: In Matthew 5:44, Jesus says, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." In Matthew 5:39, Jesus talks about turning the other cheek. Read some of the Church Fathers' writings about these well-known verses. Consider what challenges the Church Fathers were consoling their flocks through when they wrote about these passages.
- B.** In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God (Matthew 5:9). Consider that it takes action to bring about peace. The ultimate example of taking action to create peace is God's sacrifice of His Son. Consider what actions we can take to promote peace in our lives and in our communities.
- C.** Consider that what unites us in a Church community is Christ's love and love of the Church and service. You sit side by side with people in Church who may disagree with you ideologically, but we know that God loves you equally. Consider ways in which the Church provides us an opportunity to get to know one another on a different level by worshiping together, doing good works together, and consoling one another in times of hardship. Write about your experiences.

Here are some resources you can explore as you do your research:

- A.** An excerpt of Saint John Chrysostom's homily on the 11th Sunday of Matthew, focusing on forgiving our enemies: www.straphaeldetroit.org/files/Say-not-then-that-he-insulted-you.pdf
- B.** An article with an Orthodox perspective on the Beatitude Blessed are the Peacemakers: www.oca.org/orthodoxy/the-orthodox-faith/spirituality/the-beatitudes/peacemakers
- C.** An article: Forgiveness and Reconciliation: How to Forgive Others and Receive Reconciliation by Hieromonk Jonah: ww1.antiochian.org/content/forgiveness-and-reconciliation-how-for-give-others-and-receive-forgiveness
- D.** Be the Bee #107 | Four Ways to Forgive by Y2AM of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America: www.youtube.com/watch?v=i8pfuimXIM0

TOPIC 5

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ both transforms the relationship between God and humanity and alters the course of history.

How would you explain its significance to someone who has not heard about it or is unsure if God exists?

Here are a few suggested ways you could research and develop your speech:

- A.** The Resurrection of Jesus Christ is both the culmination of this age's redemptive history, and the source of our communion with God. In what ways does the Resurrection transform the relationship between God and humanity? In what ways did God reveal Himself before the Incarnation, death, and Resurrection, and how did that change? Why does the Church affirm – and we believe – in the Trinity?
- B.** What makes Orthodox Christianity unique among all religions and spiritual beliefs? For example, moral codes, metaphysics (the belief that there is something beyond matter and this world), inspiring religious leaders, the belief in God or gods, etc., are shared by all major religions. What is the most unique aspect or claim in Orthodox Christianity that is not present anywhere else?
- C.** The Resurrection is both an event which allows us to personally encounter Christ as the Risen Son of God, and a historical event which happened on the first day of the week in Jerusalem, about 1,990 years ago. What are some of the most important historical evidences for the Resurrection? How would you explain that event and its implications to someone who is not sure God exists?
- D.** Christians were originally a small group of eyewitnesses of the Resurrection, living in a society that was religiously hostile to them. The Jewish religion did not believe Jesus of Nazareth was the Risen Messiah, and the Roman empire religion was polytheistic. How did the Resurrection empower Christians to maintain and develop their identity, to the point of becoming the biggest religion in the world in just a few centuries?
- E.** What is the significance of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ in your own life? What does it mean to worship God not only as an idea, but to encounter the Risen Christ personally, and through Him, in the power of the Holy Spirit, come to know the Father? How would you explain that to someone who is not sure God exists?

Here are some resources you can explore as you do your research:

- A.** Read through this brief introduction from the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, and study the Scriptural passages listed: www.goarch.org/pascha-learn
- B.** *The Religion of the Apostles* by Stephen De Young: <https://store.ancientfaith.com/the-religion-of-the-apostles/>
- C.** *Arise, O God*, by Andrew Stephen Damick: www.amazon.com/Arise-God-Gospel-Christ-Defeat/dp/1955890021
- D.** Read through St. John Chrysostom's Paschal Homily and explore the implications of its content and the Scriptural references: www.oca.org/fs/sermons/the-paschal-sermon
- E.** Three videos by Y2AM of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America:
Be the Bee #31 | Christ is Risen!: <https://youtu.be/LthDxSrRzOI>
Be the Bee #10 | Thankful for the Resurrection: <https://youtu.be/9jVihO4ZFII>
Be the Bee #68 | Salvation in Christ: <https://youtu.be/c1j2oBtOcfw>

JUNIOR DIVISION

(GRADES 7-9)

Select one of the five following topics:

TOPIC 1

Orthodox tradition teaches that the Saints remain spiritually active beyond their earthly life. Discuss how we ask the Saints to intercede and pray for us and why.

Here are a few suggested ways you could research and develop your speech:

- A.** Do you or your family practice a devotion to a certain Saint? If so, what has it meant in your life? Remember to include in your speech not just your personal experiences but some research that you have done about the life of that Saint, and to engage the question of why we ask the Saints to intercede for us.
- B.** We pray to certain Saints for specific ailments, for example, Saint Paraskevi for vision and Saint Anna for having a child. Other Saints are considered the patron Saints of certain vocations – Saint Nicholas for sailors, Saint Panteleimon for physicians, Saint Ephrosynos for cooks, and the Three Hierarchs for students. Select a Saint and read about their life. Explain why as Orthodox Christians, we pray to that Saint in the ways that we do.
- C.** The practice of praying through Saints can be found in Christian writings from the 3rd century onward. There are also special Paraklesis prayer services directed to individual Saints. Read one of these prayer services and consider how we venerate the Saint in that service.
- D.** At the wedding at Cana, Jesus performs His first miracle at the urging of His Mother, the Virgin Mary. Read the passage in John 2:1-11. Consider how this sets a precedent for intercessory prayer. Why would Jesus alter His timetable for revealing His divinity at the request of His Mother? Why do we pray now to the Theotokos and other Saints to ask God to help us?

Here are some resources you can explore as you do your research:

- A.** The *Orthodox Saints* series of books (4 volumes organized following the Liturgical year) by Rev. Fr. George Poulos: <https://www.amazon.com/Orthodox-Saints-Spiritual-Profiles-Jan-March/dp/0917651642>
- B.** The Paraklesis Service to the Theotokos (or a Paraklesis Service to another Saint): www.goarch.org/-/small-paraklesis

TOPIC 2

Orthodox Christians honor the Virgin Mary, the Most Holy Theotokos. What does the Orthodox Church believe about her and her role in our salvation?

Here are a few suggested ways you could research and develop your speech:

- A.** Read the *Life of the Virgin Mary*. Consider the courage and faith it must have taken to accept God's will and bear a Child. Consider the role she played at the Wedding of Cana. Consider how difficult it must have been for her to witness her Son's crucifixion. Write about the example she sets for all of us through her life and why the Orthodox Church considers her the greatest example of humanity.
- B.** Read the *Life of the Virgin Mary* by John Geometres, who recounts in detail her entire life. The material is presented in chronological order and organized largely around the Marian feasts of the Byzantine ecclesiastical year (as well as the feasts of Christ at which the Virgin was historically present). You have probably heard about the Virgin Mary your whole life. What does this reading teach you that you hadn't known and that others might not know?
- C.** There are more Church feast days dedicated to the Virgin Mary than to any other Saint. For example, we celebrate her nativity, her entrance into the temple, the annunciation, and her falling asleep or dormition. Pick one of these feast days and read about it. Read the hymns and explain what the Church is commemorating and why.
- D.** Orthodox teaching holds that eternal salvation is made possible because of the birth, death, and Resurrection of Jesus. At certain times in the Divine Liturgy and during other services, we sing, 'Most Holy Theotokos save us!' Research and write about why we do this.

Here are some resources you can explore as you do your research:

- A.** An Orthodox perspective on the Virgin Mary: <https://orthodoxwiki.org/Theotokos>
- B.** *Life of the Virgin Mary* by John Geometres: www.hup.harvard.edu/catalog.php?isbn=9780674290808
- C.** The Lamentation of Mary at the Cross on the Digital Chant Stand of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America: <https://dcs.goarch.org/goa/dcs/js/viewer/web/viewer.html?file=/goa/dcs/p/b/tr/d070/em3/en/bk.tr.d070.em3.pdf>
- D.** These links on the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America site describe several of the Feast Days dedicated to the Virgin Mary:
 - i. Nativity: www.goarch.org/nativity-theotokos
 - ii. Entrance to the Temple: www.goarch.org/entrance-theotokos
 - iii. Annunciation: www.goarch.org/annunciation
 - iv. Dormition: www.goarch.org/dormition
- E.** Be the Bee #41 | God's Mother, Our Mother by Y2AM of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America: www.youtube.com/watch?v=U3B8bZcpPU0

TOPIC 3

The sacraments are the mysteries of the Church through which God gives us His grace through actions, words, and material objects (for example, oil, wine, and bread). Pick one sacrament and explain its meaning.

Here are a few suggested ways you could research and develop your speech:

- A.** The word Sacraments comes from Latin. In Greek, we refer to the Sacraments as Mysteria (μυστήρια), which translates to Mysteries. What do these words convey in this context? What are the different aspects each word emphasizes?
- B.** Consider why the Sacraments only take place as part of the Liturgical life of the Body of Christ (the Church)? For example, why is it that the bread and the wine become the Body and Blood of Christ only during the Divine Liturgy?
- C.** What are the Mysteries used in the Orthodox Church? How do they relate to one another? For example, in the Orthodox Church, the Holy Eucharist (Holy Communion) is the center of the ecclesiastical and sacramental life. If you pick the Holy Eucharist, how does it relate to the other Mysteries? If you pick another, how does it relate to the Holy Eucharist?
- D.** What is the relationship between God's grace and the elements through which He has chosen to convey that grace? For example, although God gives His grace in many different ways, He has chosen to work through water in Baptism, oil in Chrismation and Holy Unction, bread and wine for Holy Communion, etc. How does the element used in the Mystery you pick form a bridge between God and creation?
- E.** What is the relationship between the grace God gives and the recipient's free will? For example, why are prayer and proper preparation necessary for receiving Holy Communion? Or, as another example, why is repentance necessary for the sacrament of Confession?

Here are some resources you can explore as you do your research:

A. The following are suggested resources from modern Orthodox authors on the Sacraments:

i. *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy* by Alexander Schmemmann:

www.amazon.com/Life-World-Sacraments-Orthodoxy/dp/0913836087

ii. *The Eucharist: Sacrament of the Kingdom* by Alexander Schmemmann:

www.amazon.com/Eucharist-Sacrament-Kingdom-Alexander-Schmemmann/dp/0881410187/ref=sr_1_1?crd=1DMSNRDTRZLCO&keywords=The+Eucharist:+Sacrament+of+the+Kingdom&qid=1664499792&qu=eyJxc2MiOilwLjAwliwicXNhIjoiMC4wMCIlInFzcCI6IjAuMDAifQ%3D%3D&s=books&sprefix=the+eucharist+sacrament+of+the+kingdom,strip-books,179&sr=1-1

iii. *Of Water and the Spirit* by Alexander Schmemmann:

www.amazon.com/Water-Spirit-Liturgical-Study-Baptism/dp/0913836109/ref=sr_1_9?qid=1664500265&refinements=p_27:Alexander+Schmemmann&s=books&sr=1-9&text=Alexander+Schmemmann

iv. *The Seven Sacraments of the Orthodox Church* by Rev. Fr. Philip G. Gialopsos:

www.amazon.com/Seven-Sacraments-Greek-Orthodox-Church/dp/B0007176CK

v. *The Mystery of Faith: An Introduction to the Teaching and Spirituality of the Orthodox Church* by Hilarion Alfeyev: <https://svspress.com/the-mystery-of-faith/>

vi. *Orthodox Christianity Volume V: Sacraments and Other Rites* by Hilarion Alfeyev:

www.amazon.com/Orthodox-Christianity-Sacraments-Other-Rites/dp/0881416436/ref=sr_1_1?crd=2UN82QKHWXXHI&keywords=Orthodox+Christianity+Volume+V%3A+Sacraments+and+Other+Rites&qid=1665703891&qu=eyJxc2MiOilxLjM4liwicXNhIjoiMC4wMCIlInFzcCI6IjAuMDAifQ%3D%3D&s=books&sprefix=orthodox+christianity+volume+v+sacraments+and+other+rites%2Cstripbooks%2C119&sr=1-1

B. The Greek Orthodox Archdiocese has a helpful introduction to the Sacraments:

www.goarch.org/-/the-sacraments

C. A series of links with introductory information on the Sacraments:

www.assumption.ny.goarch.org/our-faith/seven-sacraments/

D. Be the Bee #119 | What is a Sacrament by Y2AM of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JN20cpM6zpQ>

E. *Holy Mysteries: The Sacraments of the Orthodox Church* by the Department of Religious Education of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America:

<https://orthodoxmarketplace.com/holy-mysteries-the-sacraments-of-the-orthodox-church-student-book/>

TOPIC 4

Jesus models and teaches humility throughout His life and ministry. Discuss the challenges of living according to Jesus' teachings in a society that does not necessarily emphasize humility.

Here are a few suggested ways you could research and develop your speech:

- A.** Consider what is valued in our society – a culture where celebrities, influencers, and by extension, all of us are encouraged to build a personal brand and promote ourselves on social media. How might this focus on self-promotion pull us away from the Church and living a Christian life?
- B.** Consider some common principles of what it takes to 'get ahead' in American society. What is typically meant by success? Wealth? Fame? Popularity? Where should we be focusing our efforts if our goal in life is to be worthy of reunion with God? Consider and discuss some practical examples of things you can do now as a teenager to emulate Christ's humility.
- C.** Think about the ways that Christ demonstrated humility in His life and ministry. He rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, the most humble of animals. He washed His disciples' feet. He who was sinless sacrificed His life for our sins. And He is called the King of Kings. Consider what it means to be a selfless leader. Can you live a life that others look up to by being selfless? If so, how?
- D.** Genuine humility means that you recognize your own flaws and sins. It means that you care more about other people – and the community – than you do about yourself. Imagine what it would be like to live in a society where everyone was humble.

Here are some resources you can explore as you do your research:

- A.** This article explores an Orthodox perspective on humility and identifies several examples and verses about humility in the Old and New Testament: www.oca.org/orthodoxy/the-orthodox-faith/spirituality/the-virtues/humility
- B.** Be the Bee # 135 | The Importance of Service(s) with His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America by Y2AM of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America: www.youtube.com/watch?v=BSciknJoXrA

TOPIC 5

Consider and discuss why and how icons are central to our faith and Orthodox practice.

Here are a few suggested ways you could research and develop your speech:

- A.** The Orthodox teaching about icons was defined at the Seventh Ecumenical Council of 787 AD, and reaffirmed in the Council of 843 AD. This teaching is summarized in the Seventh Ecumenical Council's proclamation, and the text read during Vespers of the Sunday of Orthodoxy. What are the main points of each text?
- B.** Icons are windows of heaven in the sense that they unite the persons depicted in them with us, bringing heaven and earth together. In what way is that communion made possible?
- C.** The Holy Spirit unites us to God through Christ and unites us to one another now and beyond the barrier of physical death. How does the Holy Spirit work through the icons, sanctifying matter, to make heaven present to us?
- D.** The icons are not mere objects of decoration. They are painted within canonical rules, and they are set apart for Liturgical purposes and personal devotional purposes. Some icons have exhibited miraculous evidence, such as streaming myrrh. Discuss some ways in which icons differ from or transcend common objects of art.
- E.** The Fathers make a distinction between worship and veneration, especially as that applies to icons. Saint John of Damascus says, "I do not worship matter, I worship the God of matter, who became matter for my sake, and deigned to inhabit matter, who worked out my salvation through matter. I will not cease from honoring that matter which works my salvation. I venerate it, though not as God." Explain the difference, and what constitutes the veneration of icons.

Here are some resources you can explore as you do your research:

- A.** The proclamation of the Seventh Ecumenical Council: <https://www.goarch.org/-/the-seventh-ecumenical-council>
- B.** The text read at Vespers on the Sunday of Orthodoxy: www.goarch.org/-/on-icons-and-the-sunday-of-orthodoxy
- C.** A key Patristic writing, *On the Divine Images* by St. John of Damascus: <https://svspress.com/three-treatises-on-the-divine-images-st-john-of-damascus/>
Also available as online text: <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/johndamascus-images.asp>
- D.** Be the Bee #169 | Why We Venerate Icons (Sunday of Orthodoxy) by Y2AM of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=amq8rCqV_70
- E.** Be the Bee #53 | Venerating Icons by Y2AM of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America: www.goarch.org/-/venerating-icons

DON'T FORGET!

Everything participants need to know about eligibility, speech requirements, and guidelines can be found in the Oratorical Festival Manual under the Participant Information section: www.goarch.org/oratorical

St. John Chrysostom Oratorical Festival
Department of Religious Education (DRE)
Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America
Email: oratorical@goarch.org
Toll-free: 800.566.1088
www.religioused.goarch.org
f @goarchORATORICAL

