



ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM ORATORICAL FESTIVAL

2024 TOPIC TIPS & RESOURCES

ABOUT THE ORATORICAL FESTIVAL

The St. John Chrysostom Oratorical Festival is a nationwide Department of Religious Education (DRE) ministry of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America that centers around faith, education, and fellowship. Greek Orthodox youth participants present speeches discussing the faith and the Church through exploring and deepening their faith while honing their speech writing and public speaking skills.

National finalists earn sizeable monetary awards, and finalists at all four levels earn scholarships. The Oratorical Festival was established in 1983, by DRE Director Ernest Villas and Minerva Stergianopoulos, and began in 1984.

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. They then proceed to the district or metropolis level. Two finalists representing each Metropolis of the Archdiocese advance to the National Finals on June 7-9, 2024, hosted by the Metropolis of Detroit at Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church in Buffalo, New York.

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/oratorical

AWARDS & SCHOLARSHIPS

Participants at the National Finals receive awards from the St. John Chrysostom Oratorical Festival Award Fund, ranging from \$500 to \$2000, and FAITH: An Endowment for Orthodoxy and Hellenism. The Chrysostom Scholarship Program of Hellenic College Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology also offers scholarships at all four levels of the Oratorical Festival ranging from \$2,500 to \$30,000 per year.



JUNIOR DIVISION

(GRADES 7-9)

SELECT ONE OF THE FOLLOWING FIVE TOPICS

JUNIOR DIVISION TOPIC 1

His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew has earned the title of the Green Patriarch, and was named one of Time Magazine's 100 Most Influential People in the World, for His teachings about humanity's spiritual responsibility for taking care of God's creation — planet earth. His All-Holiness stands on the shoulders of Saints, who taught that the world is a gift from God, and that taking care of His creation is a way to connect with God. Explore and discuss the teachings of His All-Holiness and the Saints on the creation of the world. What are some of our practical responsibilities as stewards of our planet, and how does that enrich our lives as Christians?

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

- A.** Read what the Patriarch says about the Christian responsibility to be stewards of the environment. Consider why he refers to environmental disregard as sin.
- B.** Consider how the Patriarch's words are consistent with the 2000+ year Orthodox tradition. While the context is different, because the Church Fathers were not writing at a time when they were facing an environmental crisis, several Church Fathers write about the sanctity of God's creation and human responsibility to take care of God's creation.
- C.** Consider references to the natural world in the Bible – such as the Creation account, Jesus being baptized in a river, sin leading to the destruction of the world by flood, and Noah's preservation of species of animals – and what we can learn from these about our responsibility to the world God created.
- D.** Think about the practical ways that teenagers can put into practice the Patriarch's urging to be better stewards of the environment.
- E.** Consider how our materialistic society (disposable fashion, hyper-consumerism, etc.) exacerbates the environmental crisis. Consider how the Orthodox practice of fasting and other Lenten disciplines can be applied to help us live more responsibly and symbiotically with the created order. Consider the simple ways of life of monastics and ascetics and what we can learn from them.

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

A. The Social Ethos document was published by the Ecumenical Patriarchate in 2020. It provides practical guidance on how Orthodox Christians should consider contemporary social issues.

The purpose of the document is to offer a reference on vital issues and challenges in the world today in ways that are consistent with living as Orthodox Christians. Read the sections of the [Social Ethos document](#) on the GOA site about the environment.

B. Public Orthodoxy features several articles on [environmentalism](#) and [environmental ethics](#). Here are two recent articles by Chris Durante on the topic of the climate crisis and environmental sin:

- [Part 1](#)
- [Part 2](#)

JUNIOR DIVISION TOPIC 2

Many of us have heroes to whom we look up. It may be an older brother or sister, an athlete, or a musician. We have heroes in our religious life, as well as people who inspire us to practice our faith. They teach us, usually by example, how we ought to live as Orthodox Christians. Select a Saint or person who has been the most influential in your spiritual life. Describe the particular and practical ways that influence has taken place.

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

- A. Research the life of a favorite saint and describe what we can learn from how they lived their life. Talk about why this saint is meaningful to you and your family.
- B. Consider someone you know in your personal life (a priest, a relative, a member of your parish) who has inspired you to work to be a better Christian. Describe the influence they have had on your life and how they have brought Jesus's teaching to life. Why was their practice of Christianity so meaningful to you?

NOTE: The Oratorical Festival manual states that speeches should not include personally identifying information to ensure fairness. If you are referring to a priest or other currently alive church figure, please only use their first name (e.g. Fr. John) and don't indicate the parish that they serve.

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

- A. [This video](#) featuring Rev. Dr. John Chryssavgis and Dr. James Skedros discusses the difference between saints and martyrs, how someone becomes a saint in the Orthodox church, and introduces some modern saints.
- B. You can search for some information about Orthodox saints in the [Saint Search](#) on the GOArch site. Other books including [Orthodox Saints](#) by Rev. George Poulos, [101 Orthodox Saints](#) by Sarah Wright and Alexandra Schmalzbach go into more detail.

JUNIOR DIVISION TOPIC 3

On the Day of Theophany (January 6), we chant, "All those who have been baptized in Christ have put on Christ" (Gal. 3:27). Discuss the meaning of this hymn and the obligations it places upon us as Orthodox Christians.

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

A. Theophany is the celebration of Jesus's baptism in the Jordan River by St. John the Baptist. This hymn "All those who have been baptized in Christ have put on Christ" is also chanted at all Orthodox baptisms. In the ritual of Orthodox baptisms, the person mystically dies with Christ when they are submerged in the water, and then is resurrected with Christ when they emerge out of the water. This is the process by which eternal life is accessible to the Christian community.

B. Consider what it means to live a Christ-like life. Consider how baptism cleanses us from our sins. Consider why Christ – who is both God and a perfect, sinless human – would want to participate in baptism and be baptized by John the Baptist. Consider how John the Baptist responded to Jesus's request to baptize Him, consider what we can learn about Jesus, and how we should be living our lives from this exchange.

C. The hymn quotes Galatians 3:27. Consider the broader context of that chapter of St. Paul's letter to the Christian community living in Galatia. The verse that immediately follows (Gal. 3:28) is the most explicit statement of human equality in the New Testament. It is 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.– In Christ, there is neither Jew nor Greek, etc.' Think about what this additional verse is saying about what it means to put on Christ.

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

A. Read chapter 15 (pages 66 – 69) in [On the Holy Spirit by Saint Basil the Great](#), which is one of the first texts that explains the role of the Holy Spirit in baptism and how baptism enables us to participate in eternal life.

B. Read the Gospel accounts about the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist:

- Matthew 3: 1 – 17
- Mark 1: 1 – 15
- Luke 3: 1 – 22
- John 1: 1 - 51

C. Read the broader context of the Galatians chapter in which this verse is referenced – Galatians 3: 19 – 29.

JUNIOR DIVISION TOPIC 4

When reading the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15: 11-32), we learn about the various stages of repentance. What are they? How do they relate to the reversal of the son's journey away from the father? What does the father's reaction upon seeing his son teach us about our relationship to our Father in Heaven?

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

- A.** Consider the various metaphors for the spiritual life that are in the parable. Who is the prodigal son? Who is the father? Who is the brother? What is the foreign land? Etc.
- B.** How does the season of Lent and the sacrament of confession help us to repent and return to God?
- C.** The hymns for the Orthros service of the Sunday of the Prodigal Son and for the Second Sunday of Lent offer deep reflections on the themes of this parable. What insights do these hymns offer to help us learn more about repentance?

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

- A.** Watch this short sermon on the Sunday of the Prodigal Son: [Orthodox Scholars Preach: Sunday of the Prodigal Son - Kyra Limberakis](#).
- B.** Watch this [Be the Bee episode about the Parable of the Prodigal Son](#).
- B.** Search the [Digital Chant Stand](#) for the Sunday hymns in Orthros – these hymns change every Sunday. In 2024, the Sunday of the Prodigal Son is March 3.

JUNIOR DIVISION TOPIC 5

The Orthodox Church has a rich heritage of sacred hymns that "contribute radiant and poetic splendor to Orthodox worship," thus, opening the way to God. Select your favorite Church hymn and talk about how it strengthens your faith.

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

A. Did you know that the Orthodox Church sings thousands of hymns over one year? In any given service, there are some hymns that appear every time, some that appear according to the date, some that appear according to the day of the week, some that appear according to a Liturgical season, like Lent, and some that are used only because of the patron saint of the church. Consider how your favorite hymn fits into this pattern.

B. What is it about your hymn that makes it special? Does it remind you of your home parish or maybe a family member? Does it give you hope or consolation? Does it help you to be more mindful?

C. If your favorite hymn is connected to a particular saint, learn what you can about that saint so that you can understand how the hymn relates to the saint's life or the expectation that the saint can be of help to us now.

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

A. For this topic, the resources that you choose will be determined by the hymn that you select. For a complete list of all of the hymns currently in use in the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese, consult the [Digital Chant Stand](#).

SENIOR DIVISION

(GRADES 10-12)

SELECT ONE OF THE FOLLOWING FIVE TOPICS

SENIOR DIVISION TOPIC 1

Slandered without cause, convicted without a trial, exiled unjustly — this was the life endured by one of the greatest saints of our times — Saint Nektarios of Aegina. Forgiving others who hurt us that deeply and unjustly seems almost impossible. What can we learn from Saint Nektarios, whose life was about forgiving what some might call the impossible?

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

- A. Summarize one or two examples of the persecutions Saint Nektarios faced and how he responded to those. Compare that to how people typically respond to even smaller injustices than what he suffered. Consider what we can learn from his example. Include some of Saint Nektarios's own words in your talk.
- B. Read about some of the miracles attributed to Saint Nektarios and consider why God would act through a saint like Saint Nektarios.

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

- A. Watch the film [Man of God](#) by Yelena Popovic.
- B. Read some of the homilies of Saint Nektarios: [On Care for the Soul Volume 2](#).
- C. Read about some of the miracles attributed to Saint Nektarios:
 - [Two posthumous miracles of Saint Nektarios](#).
 - [Miracle of Saint Nektarios: The Healing of Fr. Nektarios Vitalis of Cancer](#).
 - [Great miracle of Saint Nektarios](#).

SENIOR DIVISION TOPIC 2

The Apostle Paul refers to Adam as the first man, and Christ as the Second Adam. The Fathers of the Church, especially Saint Irenaeus of Lyon, refer to Christ and Panagia as the Second Adam and the Second Eve. Why is the Most Holy Theotokos called the "Second Eve"? And why is Christ called the "Second Adam?" How do Christ and Panagia fulfill and go beyond their prototypes?

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

- A.** Compare Genesis Chapter 2 (which describes the creation of Adam) to 1 Corinthians 15 (where St. Paul speaks of Christ as the second Adam). Why would St. Paul offer this analogy? What is he saying about the restoration of humanity? Why is it important that Christ became human?
- B.** Consult Romans 5:12-21, where St. Paul develops this analogy further. How does St. Paul connect Adam to death and sin? How does this impact us? Consider the ways in which we remain linked to Adam and how, like Adam, we are in need of Christ's sacrifice.
- C.** Consider why some of the Church Fathers refer to the Virgin Mary as the second Eve. What are the implications of this paradigm?
- D.** Learn more about St. Irenaeus of Lyon and why he thought it was so important for the Christians of the second century to understand these analogies.

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

- A.** St. Irenaeus' development of the Eve/Virgin Mary paradigm comes from his book, *Against Heresies*, 3.22: [St. Irenaeus: The Theotokos and Eve](#).
- B.** Consult St. John Chrysostom's commentary on 1 Corinthians 15:45-48:
 - [Homily 41 on First Corinthians](#)
 - [Homily 42 on First Corinthians](#)
- C.** Consult St. John Chrysostom's commentary on [Romans 5: 12-21: Homily 10](#).

SENIOR DIVISION TOPIC 3

Christ says, "This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:1). He also says, "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you" (John 6:53). Explore the Orthodox teaching on the Eucharist by reading the prayers of the Divine Liturgy and the writings of one or more Church Fathers.

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

- A.** Consider the relationship between the Christian sacrament of the Eucharist and the ancient Jewish rituals of animal sacrifice. What does it mean that Christ is the sacrificial offering?
- B.** Why is participation in the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, so important for Christians? What does the Church teach us about the Eucharist, sin, and eternal life?
- C.** Consider the significance of Jesus' personal sacrifice, and his willingness to be crucified for the sake of all. Reflect on the meaning of Jesus's words at the Last Supper, "this is My body, which is given for you."

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

- A.** Read the way that three of the Gospels describe the Last Supper (Mt. 26.26-29, Mk. 14.22-25, Lk. 22.15-20) as well as the way that the Gospel of John describes the significance of the Eucharist (Jn. 6.51-58).
- B.** Read the pre- and post-Communion prayers to consider what we believe occurs with the reception of the Eucharist.
- C.** Read the commentary on the Divine Liturgy by the late-Byzantine Theologian, St. Nicholas Cabasilas in this book: [A Commentary on the Divine Liturgy](#).

SENIOR DIVISION TOPIC 4

The number of natural disasters worldwide continues to increase, resulting in more communities destroyed and more lives lost. How would you respond to someone who questions why God allows natural disasters to happen when we know God can intervene at any moment? If God is all-knowing, all powerful, and all-loving, how can He allow evil things to happen?

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

- A.** Put the science of climate change into conversation with the statements of the Ecumenical Patriarch who has repeatedly described ecological disregard as sin. Who, according to our Patriarch, is responsible for the increasing frequency of natural disasters?
- B.** Research the concept of Theodicy, which is the belief in the absolute goodness of God, despite the presence of evil. How can Orthodox Christian reflections on Theodicy be applied to natural disasters?
- C.** Consider the substance of evil. Is it a force unto itself? Is it simply the absence of God? How have Orthodox Christians understood the concept of evil historically?

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

- A.** [Quotations and commentary](#) on Patriarch's statements about the environment and sin.
- B.** Read this series of [short essays](#) on the environment and environmental sin from an Orthodox perspective.
- C.** Read what the [Social Ethos Document](#) says about the Environment.
- D.** Watch this [Be the Bee episode on Theodicy](#).

SENIOR DIVISION TOPIC 5

During the Divine Liturgy, before the consecration of the Holy Gifts, we hear the priest say the following: "Your own of Your own we offer to You, in all and for all." What does this petition mean to you as an Orthodox Christian? Why is it important for us to focus on giving back out of the gifts we have been given by God?

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

- A. Reflect deeply on the meaning of these words. What is being offered? On behalf of Whom? Who is doing the offering (the priest says it, but uses the plural word "we")?
- B. In the precise context of the Divine Liturgy, the gifts are the bread and wine. But what can the idea of "holy gifts" symbolize more broadly?
- C. In what other ways can we offer gifts to God?
- D. What is the source of the various gifts that we have? To whom do these gifts ultimately belong? And what is our responsibility to steward them properly?

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

- A. Read what the [Social Ethos Document](#) says about our responsibility for others.
- B. Read this [short explanation](#) of the Eucharist in Orthodox theology.
- C. Read these [short excerpts](#) from the Church Fathers about the gifts of the Eucharist.



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