

The Vocation of Victory

Central Verse:

“Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all else will be given you.”
Matthew 6:33

Dear Clergy and Volunteers,

Glory be to Jesus Christ!

This year we will be focusing on the verse “Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all else will be given you” from the Gospel of Matthew 6:33. We will be discussing it and learning about it from the perspective of vocations. Specifically, the verse gives all humanity a very specific vocation, a purpose throughout all life. In an age when on average people will change careers (not jobs but careers) an average of 7 times in their lifetimes, the Church maintains the teaching of our Lord to give humanity its unchanging “career”: to always seek God’s Kingdom and His righteousness first above all else and before all things.

We will be teaching the campers, and learning ourselves, how we maintain vigilance about this divinely given human vocation. What does it mean for us to do this? How do we seek His Kingdom first? How do we know if we are? Again, at a time when our children are hearing about severe unemployment rates, when they are constantly hearing about financial crises, when they are bombarded by messages that only bring doubt and confusion, we are attempting to remind them, and we ourselves, that no matter the condition of the economy or the job market, we have a purpose in life that extends beyond the earthly, and causes us to live divinely.

It will be your task this year, as always, to instruct our children in godliness through the curriculum provided. Examine it thoroughly and prepare yourselves each day with your own notes and thoughts about the material presented. The most important part of teaching is being **prepared**. With that in mind, please note that the Curriculum for this year’s weeks includes not only the Faith Enrichment portion, but also the daily scripture readings, suggested sermon topics, as well as a daily Evening Cabin Talk. You are being asked to attend to each of these segments of the 2011 Curriculum for the Campers. Planning each of these segments and deliberately linking the topics in the morning sermon and evening cabin talk to the theme is a good way to give our campers a consistent message about how the theme relates to their lives.

As always, you have the pastoral prerogative to enhance and elaborate on specific elements of the curriculum, but I do ask that you work within the framework provided.

If you have any questions about the curriculum, if you need any resources, please ask me. We will help you in every way to fulfill your ministry here at Camp.

Thank you for being here this week. Thank you for setting aside the time and putting forth the effort to minister to our diocesan children. I know how precious our time is as clergy. You have devoted yours here, and I ask our Lord Jesus Christ to bless you, your families and your parishes for the gift you give us each year.

With Love in Christ,

Fr. Stephen
Camp Administrator

Monday

The Vocation of Victory: The Vocation of the Son of God

Morning Prayers:

Epistle Lesson – Philippians 2:5-11 -- equality with God as something to be grasped

Gospel – Matthew 6:25-34

Sermon: Consider...

- How Christ emptied Himself – special word: kenosis
- We are called by St. Paul to have the same “mind” as Christ, to live as He did and to give our lives as He did.
 - No reservations, no conditions
 - Give everything we have and everything we are
- How the worries of life often consume us. How we forget what God calls us to everyday: Seeking first His Kingdom and His Righteousness.
 - How easy it is to forget this calling, this Vocation
 - How it must come “First”
 - How often we give second best to God

Faith Enrichment Segment

Props: Poker Chips or coins, pail

Optional: Note Cards, pens/pencils

Give each camper several poker chips or several coins, preferably coins.

When speaking of Vocation and the purpose for which God has created us we can think in terms of that which is common to everyone, that is, to human beings as created by God, and that which is unique to each person. For example every human being is called by God to be virtuous in their behavior (to be pure in heart, merciful, humble, etc.) but some may be called by God to live out our big “V” vocation as a married person, another celibate, another monastic, another as priest, another as (name a variety of careers). One of the most important points we can make is that little “v” vocation can never get in the way of our big “V” vocation, and perhaps better put, little “v” vocation is meant to help us, teach us, correct us so that we can live the big “V”. What is that Big “V” for all of us? It is a question that has been asked since the beginning of time: Why am I here? What is the meaning of life? What am I supposed to be doing with my life? We would ask the question in a slightly different way as Orthodox Christians. We would ask: What are we all called to by God? Why has He created me, for what purpose? What is our path, the way in which we are called by God to live our life?

That’s the ultimate question. But fear not, our Lord, Jesus Christ, gave an answer without ever being asked the question. His answer to the unasked question: “Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all else will be given you.” (Matthew 6:33) This is our Vocation of Victory: to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness.

That was in essence the Vocation of the Son of God born in the flesh. He too had to seek His Father’s Kingdom, even though He never left it. He too had to seek His Father’s righteousness, even though He already had it. But He did this for us, to show us the way to live and be. We all know that Jesus was a carpenter, that he helped his foster-father Joseph in the carpentry business, but that is not the purpose for which the Father had sent Him into the world. He didn’t become man just to build homes and fix doors and put up shelves and repair floors and construct barns or stables. While that was important for Him to do, yet more important was the purpose for which He was sent by His Father. Jesus Himself never let the work He did with His foster-father Joseph get in the way of what He knew to be His calling from His Father. There was even a time when He was young (only 12 years old), when Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem without Mary or Joseph realizing it. They had gone to Jerusalem for the celebration of Passover, as was their custom each year, but when they returned

home Jesus stayed behind. It was not until 3 days later that they found Him. And where did they find Him? In the Temple listening to the elders, asking questions and teaching them, and all that heard him were amazed at His understanding and His answers (Luke 2.41-52).

Even at the tender age of 12 Jesus, the very Son of God, and yet just a boy, understood His Vocation as given Him by His Father, Our Father. In fact, Jesus asks His mother “How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” In other words, “Mom, didn’t you know I must be doing what My Father has asked me to do. Didn’t you know I need to be fulfilling my Vocation.” Jesus at a young age understood the purpose for which His Father had sent Him into the world. Even Mary His Mother and Joseph, His foster-father did not understand... It says in Scripture, “And they did not understand the saying which He spoke to them.” But Jesus understood what His Father called Him to be and do. Simply, the Son of God was sent into the world to die upon the Cross to save His people from their sins.

Do you know what God Our Father is calling you to be and do? What He calls each of us to be and do throughout our entire life? What is amazing is that whether we are 8 or 80 years old, you and I have the very same purpose, the very same calling, the very same Vocation throughout our entire life. God calls us to do the very same thing, which is what Jesus did all the time: “Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all else will be given you.” This is what Jesus did, and it is what we are called to do right here, right now, and during every moment of our life. This is how we are all the same. We are all called to seek the Kingdom of God first and God promises us that everything else we need will be given to us.

For the Younger Kids – talk about the game of Hide-and-Seek. What do they like about the game?

- *Hiding?*
- *Seeking?*
- *Finding?*
- *Not getting caught?*
- ***Getting to home safely?***

The one to focus on for the younger campers is “Getting to home safely.” In the same way, we are called to make it to the Kingdom of God safely—we are called to seek first the Kingdom of God. Just like we run hard for home in Hide-and-Seek, we must “run hard” for the Kingdom of Heaven every day. We do that by living the Beatitudes, by saying, thinking and doing what is blessable by God, what is well-pleasing to Him. We do this by being careful about how we act, what we say, what we think, like we are careful where to hide and when to move in Hide-and-Seek.

For Younger or Older Campers – take about the game Capture the Flag. What do they like about the game?

- *Strategy?*
- *Being on a Team?*
- *Hiding their “flag”?*
- ***Discovering/Figuring out where the other flag is?***
- *Defending their flag?*

The one to focus on for the campers is Discovering where the other flag is. What a great feeling it is to discover and safely retrieve the other team’s “flag”. Why is it such a great feeling?: Victory! Times that by 40 kabillion when it comes to “capturing” the Kingdom of Heaven. What a great feeling it will be to arrive there, to stay there forever. It will be like a never ending feeling of victory.

We begin to see, even early on in Christ’s life, the incredible Vocation of Victory which He fulfilled. It was a vocation that was promised by God before it ever happened. God’s own Son was “Given Away” to us, and God, His Father, allowed Him to be mistreated in the end, allowed Him to be hurt by humanity, allowed Him to be killed on the Cross by the very creatures He had come to save. But what the world did not see was that Christ was fulfilling an amazing Vocation of Victory! That Victory was over death, and He freed us from it. We are called to that same Vocation of Victory. We too are called to seek the Kingdom of Heaven first and to “capture” the flag, to “capture” the Kingdom of Heaven. No matter what else is happening in our life, no

matter what age we are, no matter if we are 8 or 80 each of us is called by God to do the same thing, to seek first the Kingdom of Heaven and its righteousness, we are all called to “capture” the flag of the Kingdom of Heaven.

If there is still time left continue with what is below...

You’ve heard the expression “All in” – it’s popular now because of the rise of TV shows about poker (Texas Hold’em, etc.). What does the expression mean? It means that you are giving everything you have to something. It means that not only are you giving everything you have, but also everything you are. Well, Christ was “all in”. He gave all that He had and all that He was to His Father and for us. He even gave up, as St. Paul says, His equality with God, to save us. This too is our vocation with God, with His Church and with each other – we are called by Him to imitate His Son and give all that we have and all that we are when God calls us. What do we say in Church, “Let us commend ourselves and one another, and our WHOLE LIFE unto Christ our God.” We don’t say let us commend ourselves, one another, and part of our life to Christ our God... We say our WHOLE LIFE.

But how do we show we are “all in” with Christ, with God our Father as Christ was going so far as to die on a Cross for us?

First we must be willing to give up everything for the sake of the Kingdom and its righteousness. The Son was willing to give up His equality with the Father, He was willing to descend from Heaven to us, He was willing to feel loneliness and fear as a man because He loved us and was “all in”. What must we be willing to give up, what must we give up for the sake of God and His Kingdom. At every moment the answer must be EVERYTHING because that’s what Christ did for us.

Have the Campers throw all their chips/coins to a specific spot, or into the pail and shout “I’m all in!” This is a way to demonstrate how we must be with God. If you use real coins ask the campers how it felt to have to “give back” the coins. Did anybody not want to give them back, give them up? Why?

Now ask Campers what the Church asks them to “give up” for the sake of gaining the Kingdom of Heaven and its righteousness. Make a list:

Food, sleep, family, events, sports, sleepovers, friends, money, own time, relaxation, convenience – all these and more we must give up at one time or another, in order to seek the Kingdom, capture its flag... in order to fulfill our Vocation of Victory.

SECOND we like Christ must be joyful about our Vocation to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. This is how Christ fulfilled His vocation. His joy was complete as He ministered to those around Him, as he taught, preached and healed. His joy was complete because He did His Father’s will and kept His commandments. Christ wants that same joy for all of us. We can’t be sad about have to “give up” to gain the Kingdom. What we give up does not compare to what we are getting. We give up a little (though it feels like a lot sometimes) but we are gaining everything, even the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus even says to His Apostles, “These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.” (John 15:11) Christ wants for us the same joy He had in fulfilling the commandments, in seeking first God’s Kingdom and His righteousness. That joy is one of the signs that we are “all in”, that we are giving to God everything that we have and are in this moment.

The Christian life is a joyful life. It’s the best life, the only life. God has given us His Kingdom forever and ever. How can that life not be joyful. Christ says to His Apostles concerning His Death and Resurrection, “...you have sorrow now, but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you...ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.” Christ promises us that we will have a joy in us, if we live this life, if we fulfill our Vocation. While we may be tested in this life, while circumstances may hurt us as Christ Himself was hurt by those around Him, if we are “all in” and ready to fulfill our Vocation as God has called us, then Christ’s joy will be ours and that’s His promise to us. But we can’t have that joy if we are not “all in”.

The third sign that we are “all in” and fulfilling our Vocation of Victory to reach the Kingdom of Heaven is that we give no IOUs to Christ. There are no IOUs with Christ. Unfortunately, we often do give IOUs saying “I’ll pray tomorrow, I’ll go to Church next week, I’ll help around the house later, etc. Can we imagine what it would have been like if the Son of God said to the Father, “Not now dad, maybe later.” There are no IOUs with God because Christ Himself didn’t give one to His Father. He was sent into the world by His Father, came into the world and fulfilled what His Father asked of Him. He did this willingly and joyfully. When it comes to being “all in” we can’t give an IOU to God.

The fourth sign that we are “all in” with the Vocation God has given each and all of us is that we don’t wait to be asked to do something for God, for our Church, for each other. We are as our late and beloved Metropolitan has said, we are VOLUNTEERS fulfilling our VOCATION of VICTORY. We don’t wait to be asked to do something good, we don’t put off helping someone else, we don’t make excuses about not praying, we don’t forget to fast, we don’t miss church, we VOLUNTEER ourselves to God all the time, making ourselves “available” to Him in everything.

If we are willing to “give up” to get, if we are joyful about our Christian life, if we give no IOUs to God, and if we volunteer and don’t wait to be asked, if we do these things truly we will be seeking first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and will be fulfilling the Vocation of Victory to which we have all been called, following the footsteps of Christ. Truly we will be able to say “I’m all in.” Truly we’ll be able to say “Here am I Lord, send me.”

Optional Activities:

1. Have the participants write IOUs to each other. See if you can fulfill them sometime tomorrow. Ex. IOU a hug tomorrow. IOU my lunch tomorrow. IOU doing your cabin clean-up tomorrow. Etc.
2. 1 Word on a Card Game and arrange words into a sentence. Ex. FIRST, KINGDOM, SEEK, OF, THE, GOD, ... These words on separate cards and kids must figure out that they say, “Seek first the Kingdom of God...”

Evening Cabin Talk

For Teens:

- Convenience Store Christianity: Not our Vocation, Not Ever
 - Choose a church that is convenient for you – that makes life easier, that is easier to belong to than the Orthodox Church
 - Churches are not like Convenience Stores. You can’t go into different ones and find the exact same things like you can with Convenience Stores. The Orthodox Churches “sells” a different “brand” of Christianity. It is the only one that sells the true joy Christ was offering His Apostles
 - Church isn’t convenient for me – it happens on Saturday nights, it happens when I want to sleep on Sunday morning
 - Don’t be fooled by Convenience Store Christianity. There is no such thing as Convenient Christianity.
 - Was the Cross Convenient for Christ? Was it easy? Did it come at the right time?
- Can talk about those who tried to give IOUs to Christ:
 - Matthew 22:1-14 (Luke 14:16-24) – Those invited to the marriage feast were not worthy because they tried to give IOU’s to the king. The thought they could put off coming to the king, they thought they could do it later.
 - Matthew 8:21-22 – The disciple wanted time to be with his father before his father died. Christ says that he cannot even do that if he would follow Him and be His disciple
 - When it comes to service to God, “next time” never comes, “tomorrow” never happens, good intentions never turn out and the future does not exist
 - There is only each moment, and each moment we are called to give all that we have and all that we are to Christ

- Talk about our vocation to pray and what prayer is and means for the person who wants to live as God has called them to. Prayer as part of our Vocation as Human Beings.
 - Might consider reading the Gospel about when Jesus taught his disciples the “Our Father” – what it means to be children of God, to have a Heavenly Father
 - Consider Gospel account of Jesus praying alone on top of mountain, and then walking on water to the disciples – this was after a long day, then he went and prayed all night the Gospel account describes
 - Consider the vocation to pray and how difficult it is and what strength it takes
 - Consider how it is powerful in its effects – “The fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much” according to St. Paul.
 - Consider Gospel account of Jesus praying in Garden of Gethsemane. Talk about fervent prayer and the comfort given by angels.
- Talk about a specific martyr or other saint (prophet perhaps) whose call to serve God came at an inconvenient moment
 - What joy there is in serving Christ, in responding to His call
 - How do we foster an attitude of “quick response” to Christ
 - How do we foster a Vocation
- Talk about the Monastic Vocation
 - What is it?
 - When did it Start?
 - Maybe talk about St. Anthony the Great

For Youngers:

- Tell the Story of a particular saint – relate it to Vocation of Victory: Seeking first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness...
- Talk about our vocation to pray and what prayer is and means. Prayer as part of our Vocation as Human Beings.
 - Might consider reading the Gospel about when Jesus taught his disciples the “Our Father” – what it means to be children of God, to have a Heavenly Father
 - Consider Gospel account of Jesus praying in Garden of Gethsemane. Talk about fervent prayer and the comfort given by angels.

Tuesday

The Vocation of Victory: The Vocation of the Beatitudes

Morning Prayers:

Epistle Lesson: Titus 2:11-14

Gospel: The account of the Beatitudes in Matthews Gospel – Matthew 5:1-12

Morning Sermon: Consider...

- Pick a Beatitude and talk about what it means
- Talk about what the word “Beatitude” means...”Blessed” – how we are blessed by God to live this way.
- Pick a particular Saint who exemplified 1 or more of the Beatitudes

Faith Enrichment

Props: Models of Legos, other models

Lincoln Logs

When speaking of Vocation and the purpose for which God has created us we can think in terms of that which is common to everyone, that is, to human beings as created by God, and that which is unique to each person. For example every human being is called by God to be virtuous in their behavior (to be pure in heart, merciful, humble, etc.) but some may be called by God to live out our big “V” vocation as a married person, another celibate, another monastic, another as priest, another as (name a variety of careers). One of the most important points we can make is that our little “v” vocation can never get in the way of our big “V” vocation, and perhaps better put, our little “v” vocation is meant to help us, teach us, correct us so that we can live the big “V”. What is that Big “V” for all of us? It is a question that has been asked since the beginning of time: Why am I here? What is the meaning of life? What am I supposed to be doing with my life? We would ask the question in a slightly different way as Orthodox Christians. We would ask: What are we all called to by God? Why has He created me, for what purpose? What is our path, the way in which we are called by God to live our life?

That’s the ultimate question. But fear not, our Lord, Jesus Christ, gave an answer without ever being asked the question. His answer to the unasked question: “Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all else will be given you.” (Matthew 6:33) This is our Vocation of Victory: to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. Today we will talk about the part of that Big “V” Vocation that happens within us.

When Jesus spoke of how to live, when he talked to the people about what path God created them to walk he gave 9 instructions as it were, 9 blessings really: Those 9 blessings we call the Beatitudes. We sing them at most Liturgies throughout the year. Each of us is called to live the Beatitudes, to become everything that is spoken in them. When our Lord gave the Beatitudes which were included in the Sermon on the Mount, he was giving us, as it were, a pattern to follow, a model upon which to build our life.

Has anyone ever built a model before (for the younger kids maybe legos)? You know when you build a model/legos it takes a while. Sometimes the models are more complicated than others, sometimes you have to ask someone for help. But you use the instructions and diagrams, because if you didn’t you probably wouldn’t put the model together the way it’s supposed to look. We need those instructions to see what the final product is supposed to look like. Most times the instructions will give you a list of all the pieces so you know what you are working with. If you don’t have all the pieces, the model/legos doesn’t come out right, it’s not complete. Well, Jesus gave us a complete list of instructions, which if we follow to the best of our ability, our life we turn out, will look like, God intended. Beautiful, awesome, the “coolest”. The list of instructions, to build our life upon, are called the Beatitudes.

Perhaps at this point ask the campers to name some of them, maybe even sing them as we do in Liturgy

So as we go through life, we are called to be poor in spirit, meek, to mourn over our sins and the sins of the world, to hunger and thirst for righteousness, to be merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers, to allow ourselves to be persecuted for the sake of Christ, to accept reviling and persecution and slander on Christ's account. We are called to live this way, to be this way. It is how Christ was. He lived it, and our vocation is to live this way to. So not only did He give us the instructions, He Himself showed us what the model is supposed to look like. If you are looking for a way to be, a path to follow, a sure path, one that will lead you to all that you will ever need, and to all that you could ever want, if you are looking to make your life the perfect model for God and all to see, then the Beatitudes are the path on which to walk. The Beatitudes are the instructions which if followed, produce a beautiful life, something others will see and marvel at, and in the process want "one" of their own. If you are looking to answer the ultimate question: What has God called me to? What is He calling me to do? Then start with the Beatitudes. They are the Big "V" Vocation to which we are all called. No matter who we are, no matter what jobs we have, no matter if we are priests, monks, stockboys, chefs, dishwashers, lifeguards, veterinarians, we are all called to model our life after these set of "instructions". The Beatitudes give the pattern to follow when building your life.

Christ spoke these, according to Matthew's Gospel, to the multitudes that followed Him and came to Him, who were hungry, tired, poor, looking for something, anything that would help them, give them hope, encourage them in a life that was often difficult if not impossible under the rule of the Romans. As it says in Matthew's Gospel when Jesus saw the crowds, he went upon on the mountain, and when he sat down they came to him and he simply "opened his mouth and taught them" saying the Beatitudes, and then continued. Our late Metropolitan Nicholas said this about the Beatitudes. He said "Our light shines when we become the Beatitudes – when we CHOOSE to be poor, mournful, when we BECOME meek, hungry for righteousness, merciful, pure in heart and peacemakers." For us this is Vocation with a capital "V". We are all called to it, but we need to CHOOSE it and then in a process BECOME the BEATITUDES over time. ("B" (be) the "B"(Beatitudes) and you have your "V" (vocation))

The problem is there are a lot of things we can choose other than to become the beatitudes. We can choose to live in a way that is contrary to the way Jesus instructed us, explained to us, revealed to us in His own life. We can choose to live our lives in many ways that don't help us to BECOME what God has called us to be. We can change the model by following a different set of instructions, by looking to a different model after which to pattern our lives. We choose to change the way the model will turn out, by not using all the pieces/parts. Who do we often look to, other than Jesus, to show us the way, to give us instruction?:

Friends, teachers, sports figures, ourselves, etc.

We can decide to follow another set of instructions, but our life will not be the model God intended, it will become something of our own making, not patterned after His instructions. We can decide not to be children of our Heavenly Father. We can choose not to do His will. In the early Church, those who followed Jesus Christ were called those who followed "The Way" (Acts?). What way? The way Jesus laid down, spoke of, and eventually revealed by His own life. That way is the way of the Cross. We our called to live God's way, according to His will. What is God's way? It is the Beatitude Way. But again, we often choose to live in a different way than God calls us to, and that is when we disregard, set aside conveniently, the Vocation to which we are all called.

Examples of how our lives do not emulate/imitate/copy the Beatitudes: when we forget to thank God for helping us accomplish something (we are no longer poor in spirit), when we refuse to repent/to go to Confession (we are no longer mourning...over our sins), when we try to get what is someone else's or want everything (we are no longer meek), when we only look for our next meal to satisfy our hungry stomachs (we are no longer hungering and thirsting for righteousness.)

Note: You can use other examples of not living the Beatitude Way, Christ's Way.

When we fail to live this way we fail to live according to the design and purpose of God, and when that happens we are no longer living the Vocation God has called us to: to seek His Kingdom and His righteousness

above all else. The Vocation or purpose to which He has called ALL of us. We are living some other way, with another set of instructions, with other goals, other ways, but not God's way. When we forget to live the Beatitude Way we are no longer ourselves, no longer ourselves the way God has made us: no longer seeking first His Kingdom and His righteousness.

What's my purpose? Why am I here? What am I doing? We as Orthodox Christians can answer that very easily. We sing it just about every Sunday in the Beatitudes. By living the Beatitude Way, by following this Way, which was the Way Christ lived, we follow in His footsteps, and Christ's footsteps were ALWAYS those which sought first God's Kingdom and His righteousness. Christ always trusted that if He followed this "path" that His Father, our Heavenly Father, would provide Him with all else. Further, by following this path, which were Christ's own footsteps, we will never err, we will be on solid ground.

Ever heard of Identity Theft? What happens if you are the victim of identity theft?

This is what happens when we choose to live another way than the way Christ revealed to us. Our identity is being stolen and often we don't even know it. Thieves that steal your identity basically invade your life without you knowing and they steal all those things which identify you as you – your SS#, Driver's License, Credit Cards, Medical History, Insurance, etc. Without these things, stores don't recognize you, the government isn't sure who you are, insurance companies think you are someone else and don't trust you. Basically you don't exist, your life is stolen, is taken away. Well, the same thing happens in the Christian Life when we choose to live another way than Christ's way, when we choose to build our life on a set of instructions other than Christ has given. We begin to lose our identity – nobody takes our SS#, our License #, our bank accounts, etc., but what is being stolen is our life, real life with Christ. We cease to exist because we cease to live as God wants us to. Our true identity is stolen in a sense, or we simply give it away by the way we live. This is what happened to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. They tried to live another way than what God had given them to live and they discovered that the serpent, the Devil, the Evil One had tricked them into giving away their life with God and they began to die.

For us, when it comes to our Vocation with a capital "V" which is the purpose for which God has created all of us, every single human being: to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, we are all called to live the life of the Beatitudes.

Optional Activities:

1. Sing the Beatitudes – copies of it are available
2. Play the Beatitudes on CD – CD available
3. See if the Group can list the Beatitudes as a group
4. Give campers cards/paper with one word of the beatitudes on each and then have them try to form the sentence
5. Charade the Beatitudes and see who can guess which one is being portrayed (probably for older group)

Evening Cabin Talk

For Teens:

- Talk about purity. How we are all called to purity. "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God."
 - What does it mean to be pure in heart:
 - Use St. Mary as the example – she is called the "Most Pure One". Why?
 - She kept and pondered everything that happened in Jesus' life in her heart.
 - She remains Ever-Virgin – the hymn we sing about her (Resurrection Bohorodicen (hymn to the Mother of God) Tone 7?) talks about how she remained a Virgin before, during and after giving birth to the Son of God in the flesh.

- She grew up in the Temple of the Lord according to tradition and lived her days in prayer, scripture, learning, being attentive to the things of God.
- She was a gift of God to Joachim and Anna who prayed fervently for a child. Anna was barren, could not have children and yet God heard their prayers, saw their holy way of life and granted them a child who would become the Mother of God.
- Talk about Music and how it may pull us away from the Beatitudes and certainly a struggle to remain pure with modern lyrics
- Talk about any media and how it corrupts and how long it takes to get a terrible or impure image out of our minds and hearts. There was a priest who said that it would take him at least a year of fasting and prayer to remove images from movies or commercials he would see on TV.
 - The point is that whatever goes into us through our senses affects us for the better or for worse. To receive the blessing of seeing God we need to keep ourselves pure in heart.
 - How do we keep ourselves pure in heart?
 - Vigilance. Every thought captive. Prayer. Fasting. Filling our hearts and minds with Scripture. Sacraments which help us against the enemy – they arm us, protect us, purify us.

For Youngers or Teens:

- May talk about Sacrament of Penance
 - Talk about in terms of regaining the purity of heart we obtained in baptism
 - How does sin take away that purity of heart necessary to see God
 - The Sacrament of Penance not as a necessary evil, but is a necessity to combat the evil in our life and to regain what we lose each time we sin (a part of us that God has made)
 - God’s forgiveness makes us whiter than snow – it is God’s forgiveness which “washes” us in the Sacrament of Penance and “brightens” our vesture (our souls)
 - Consider reading or chanting or having someone read or chant Psalm 51 – the repentance of King David. Talk about the meaning of “...wash me and I shall be whiter than snow...”
- Talk about a particular saint who emulated one or more verses of the Beatitudes. Talk about their life and how they lived their capital “V” vocation while at same time had a little “v” vocation.
- Ex. Paul was a tentmaker (little “v” vocation) but never let it get in way of being an Apostle (capital “V” Vocation). His tent making provided for the needs of he and his companions. He did this so no one could say he was taking advantage of the Gospel, but he never let it get in the way of his Apostleship, in the way of his missionary spirit given by God. He remained true to his “Vocation” while fulfilling his and his companion’s material needs.
- Ex. Unmercenary Healers and Wonderworkers Cosmas and Damian – they were doctors, but treated people without taking pay. They lived the Gospel which says “Freely you have received, freely give”. Talk about how they could have made a lot of money but they decided to live the Gospel, not just talk about it – “Not the hearers of the law, but the doers will be justified.” They never let their “job”, their work, get in the way of their Big “V” vocation which was to live as God willed, according to the Beatitudes. By not accepting money they lived meekly and eventually inherited the Kingdom of Heaven.
- Ask Campers what they think they need in their life to be “Blessed” as the Beatitudes say.
 - How much of what we think we need are material items? Do these things get in the way of living the Beatitudes?
 - How much of what we think we need are spiritual items?

For the Youngers:

- Do more hands on stuff: give them the list of the Beatitudes – don't ask them for answers.
- Activity: Legos, Lincoln Logs – with instructions and without instructions
 - See what happens with groups with and without instructions
 - How do you know what your life is supposed to be like without instructions?
 - You don't know, so we must refer again and again to the “instructions” to help make our life great like we think our models are great.
 - What instructions do we have? The Beatitudes!

Wednesday

The Vocation of Victory: The Vocation of Promise

Morning Prayers:

Epistle Lesson – 2 Corinthians 1: 18-22

Gospel – Matthew 28:16-20

Sermon: Consider...

- What does it mean to fulfill the Great Commission: “Go therefore...”
- Evangelism of the Orthodox Church takes place mainly in your life:
 - Your neighbor, friend, family who has fallen away from Church, classmate
 - You may be the only missionary they ever meet!!
 - Whether or not they meet Jesus Christ in us is really up to us, and whether or not we really meant it when we said last year and going forward, “Here am I Lord, send me.” (Isaiah 6:8)
- The Orthodox Church will prevail. It will not only survive...it will thrive!
 - But that’s up to you and I.
 - Nothing can stand in the way of God’s love (St. Paul) – not locations of churches, not changing populations, not budget shortfalls
 - We reject the spirit of defeat and of hopelessness: We have faith in the God who unleashed His Spirit at Pentecost
 - We will open our hearts to the Holy Spirit – He makes us glad for the life in our parishes
 - The question is, “Are we glad for the life in our parishes?”
 - Making the difference is up to you and I.

Faith Enrichment Segment

Props: Bread and Butter, Song “Radar Love” or part of it

Have you ever promised something to someone and not been able to fulfill that promise? What happened? Why couldn’t you do what you said you would do? Oftentimes we are late when we have promised to be on time. Often times we have promised to call mom and dad but forgot. Often times we have made promises to God only to watch our zeal to fulfill them fade, wither and eventually disappear. We promise homework assignments and don’t do them. We promise to do chores and never get to them. We try to fulfill our promises, but in the end we often find it difficult to fulfill them.

With God, a promise is a promise, as the saying goes, and we can rely upon His promises as certain. We know that He will fulfill something if He says He will. And there are many examples of God’s promises to us. Each Beatitude comes with its own unique promise.

Ex. Blessed are the poor in spirit, // **for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.**
Blessed are those who mourn // **for they shall be comforted.**
Blessed are the meek // **for they shall inherit the earth.**
Etc.

Each Beatitude is part of that Vocation of Victory for us, and each Beatitude brings with it a promise. If you live this way, if you devote yourself to God in this way, then this is what will happen. Do we want the Kingdom of Heaven? Do we want to be comforted? Do we want to be called children of God? Do we want to obtain mercy and all the other promises given us in the Beatitudes? Then we better start understanding that they are our “ticket” to the Kingdom and better start simply doing them.

God promised us many things but in essence He promised us eternal life (1 John 2:25) and that eternal life came through another promise: that He would send His only Son to save us from death and make a way into that eternal life for us. We learned about Christ's Vocation yesterday. We learned that we have the Same Vocation of Victory He had: Seek First the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and everything else will be given you. The second part of that Vocation of Victory is a promise: If we seek the Kingdom first, then God Himself will give us everything we need, including and ultimately eternal life in His Kingdom. That's a promise. Wow! God's promise becomes what we build our life on. His promise becomes the foundation of everything we do.

That means that if we build our life on the rock of His promise, no matter what our little "v" vocation is at any time, whether to be in school, whether to be with friends, whether on a sports team, whether on vacation with our families, whether working at a pizza parlor, whether we are altar boys, church school teachers, community volunteers, whatever God is having us do and accomplish at any time, we always remember that we are CHILDREN OF A PROMISE and our Big "V" Vocation, our purpose, our calling as given by God is a VOCATION OF PROMISE. God promises us eternal life if we seek first His Kingdom.

That's our "Bread and Butter" as Orthodox Christians: The Promise of Eternal Life if we seek first God's Kingdom is our "Bread and Butter". "Bread and Butter" is an expression that means it is something we fall back on, something that is basic (to our faith), something simple that we always rely on. If everything else fails, we stick with our "Bread and Butter". If you don't like a particular meal, just stick with bread and butter. It's like a particular play in basketball or football that always seems to work. Like a particular characteristic you have that makes you who you are. That's your "bread and butter". Like a signature move in wrestling or basketball, like a particular dance move. You're good at it, so you go back to it if nothing else is working. In this case, with God's promise – it always works, it's always true, it's always right, it never fails. When God promises, it is never broken.

Have the campers talk about their "bread and butter".

- *Ask about moves in sports. Ask about moves on the dance floor.*
- *Ask about their "bread and butter" subject in school – the one they always get a better grade in than their other classes.*
- ***Especially ask about their "bread and butter" friend(s) – the one they always turn to when things are rough, the one they know they can count on.***

Have them talk about why they rely on this friend, why they know they can count on them. Link their discussion with relying on God's promise(s).

When God promises, it is never broken. Knowing this, truly believing this, gives us a joy that is full, that cannot be taken away, and that is what we learned yesterday. Jesus promised His disciples that no one would be able to take away their joy because no one could undo His Resurrection and the destruction of death. When all else fails then, when our life doesn't seem to be going so well, if we're not doing so well in school, if our relationships seem to be going nowhere, if we don't know where we want to go to college or what job we might want to do, if we are struggling with our friends, if we are worried about our families, if we are confused, afraid, lonely, ...but **ESPECIALLY** when we are doubting life in general, if it can be or is good, this is when we stick with our "bread and butter" and remember the promise of God, remember that we are children of that promise, and remember that our Vocation of Victory is a Vocation of Promise: if I do nothing else, even if all else fails, I will seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and I know then that God will give me everything else I need – that includes comfort when comfort is needed, a friend when a friend is needed, help with studying when that is needed, a stronger faith when that is required, etc. If we fulfill our part, we know that God will absolutely and without question make good on his promise.

But now we ask the tougher question: How do we fulfill our part? How do we seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness? How do I do that so that I can receive the promise of eternal life?

First we must **start believing** that the promises of God are always "Yes" (2 Cor 1:20), that they will always be fulfilled, and then we have to **start acting that way**. We have to say "Yes" back to Him in the way we live. If God says, "Yes" I am giving you my Son's Body and Blood in Communion on Sunday, then we

must say “Yes” I will fast and say the Pre-Communion Prayers to prepare for that Promise of God. If God says, “Yes” I am forgiving you your sins, then we must say “Yes” I am going to Confession regularly to receive the promise of forgiveness. If God says “Yes” I am patient with you and wait for you to turn to me, then we must say “Yes” I am patient with my family, my friends, with others in order to receive the promise of patience. If God says “Yes” I love you, I am healing you, I am merciful to you, I care for you, then we must say “Yes” to one another and love and care for one another in order to receive the promise of love, healing, and mercy. If God says “Yes” I am giving you My Kingdom, then we MUST say “YES” I am seeking Your Kingdom first and Your righteousness, and I KNOW and I BELIEVE that everything else I need will be given me. God’s promises are always “Yes” in Christ and we must respond with our own “YES!”

Ask Campers if they have seen the movie “Yes Man” with Jim Carey. It’s about a man whose life completely changes for the better, when he starts saying “Yes” to life, when he starts saying “Yes” to any request. His life “turns around” when he makes that commitment. But He was tentative at first, he wasn’t sure. Somehow he realized he couldn’t be a “Maybe” Man but had to become a “Yes” Man. We may be tentative about saying “Yes” to a service on Saturday night. We may be unsure about saying “Yes” to fasting for Communion when are bellies are screaming at us. We may doubt saying “Yes” to talking with someone our friends don’t care for.

Let the Campers continue this list with help from you. What are they tentative about saying “Yes” to for the sake of Christ? Why are they afraid, tentative, doubting? Ask them. Discuss.

*To get over fear, doubt and all the rest, to begin to fulfill our Vocation of Victory which is a Vocation of Promise we must first **start believing** that the promises of God are always “Yes”, that they will always be fulfilled and that He will help us fulfill our “Yes”.*

Have the children stand up and say “I will say YES to Christ!” “I will say YES to Love!” “I will say YES to helping the poor!” “I will say YES to compassion!” etc. – Each should say something different with the same beginning, “I will say YES...” and fill it in with something of Christ.

The second thing we must do in order to fulfill our “Yes”, in order to fulfill our Vocation to seek first God’s Kingdom and His righteousness, so that we might receive the promise of His Kingdom, is that we must look for the opportunities that God gives us to accomplish our Vocation. That means we must look for the opportunities He gives us to be His stewards, to be His volunteers, to be His evangelizers, His missionaries, His examples, His faithful, His people.

In the course of each of our lives God gives us many opportunities to fulfill our Big “V” Vocation. He will send us people in need. He will place in front of us someone poor. He will give us someone who is questioning their faith or someone who doesn’t believe. He will give us choices to make: on the one hand a “Yes” to Him, and on the other had a “No”.

Have the children list other opportunities God may give us to fulfill our calling, to help us seek He and His Kingdom first.

If we are willing to respond to Christ’s call, if we are willing to say “Yes” to love, mercy, patience, kindness, compassion, etc., then we will not have to go far to find these opportunities. God will bring them to us oftentimes.

We heard the Gospel of the Great Commission this morning. The Great Commission is: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.” (Mt.28:19-20) This is what Jesus charged His Apostles to do, it is what He charges His Church to do, it is what we are charged to do. It is His commandment. But the point here is that if our Lord tells us to do this, don’t we believe that He will also help us in every way accomplish the commandment and fulfill it. In other

words, God doesn't just give us a commandment and then say "Good luck" and not help us. It is actually sinful to think God would not help us fulfill His commandments.

But we for our part must be willing to live our Vocation, we must be ready to do what we are called to do, we must look for the opportunities God gives us, and we must believe in the promise of God.

Do you believe, are you looking, are you ready, and are you willing?

Evening Cabin Talk

For Teens and Youngers:

- Talk about those who said "Yes" to God:
 - St. Mary the Mother of God
 - Apostles Andrew and Peter, and James and John who left their nets, their boats, their father in order to say "Yes" to Christ's call to them.
 - They left money, their livelihood, their family (all symbolized by boats, nets, and father) in order to seek God's Kingdom first, and trusted that somehow all else would be given them.
 - St. Matthew – He left the tax office – how hard was that:
 - He left lots of money, a great position
 - Get "The Call of Matthew" painting by Carravagio – talk about the call of St. Matthew through his eyes – what is in the painting
- Talk about Monasticism:
 - The Angelic Life which is all about "Yes" at every moment
 - Setting aside everything to fulfill the Vocation of Victory: seeking first the Kingdom of God and His Righteousness
 -

For Teens:

- Talk about FOCUS, IOCC, OCMC, the Lived Theology School:
 - Those who have said "Yes" to God in very particular ways
 - This can be you and you can make a difference – you can fulfill your Vocation of Victory by saying "yes".
 - Literature, websites, etc.
 - You too must be a steward, a volunteer, an evangelizer, a missionary
- Evangelism of the Orthodox Church takes place mainly in your life:
 - Your neighbor, friend, family, who has fallen away from the Church, a classmate
 - You may be the only missionary they ever meet, but only if you say "Yes" to being a missionary

Supplement: Some Scriptures relating to promise.

He promised those who seek that they would find, that those who knock will have it opened to them, that those who ask would receive. He promised His disciples the Holy Spirit and He sent Him upon them. He promises those who honor father and mother a long life. He promises that those who do His commandments will be His friends. God promised Abraham, and Abraham, who patiently endured everything, obtained that promise (Heb 6:14). God promised that He would send His Son into the world to save us, and He did. He gave His Son to us and fulfilled His promise. He promised us a place in His Kingdom (Heb 9:15) and rest there (Heb. 4:1). In the end, He has promised us eternal life. (1 John 2:25).