



Sermon for use on Camping Ministry Sunday

Beloved in Christ,

We gather here each Sunday and all feast days where our hearts are lifted up by the promise we receive in St Matthew's gospel "*For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.*" Although we receive spiritual nourishment through His words and His body and blood offered to us for the forgiveness of our sins, it is essential that we take these gifts outside the church building and into the world beyond.

St John Chrysostom encourages us to "Make your home a church, since you are accountable for the salvation of your wife and children." He does not say, "*Make it perfect,*" or "*Make it prosperous,*" but make it a place where Christ is present. If where two or three are gathered together in Christ's name, there is Christ; how much more where husband, wife, and children are united in prayer.

The world tells us that families are held together by shared interests, by finances, or by emotions. But the Fathers of the Church tell us something far deeper: families are held together by prayer. When a family prays together, something sacred happens. The father learns to lead not by command, but by humility. The mother reflects the prayerful watchfulness of the Church. The children learn, not only how to speak to God, but how to listen.

Prayer does not remove all conflict—but it transforms conflict. It teaches forgiveness before sleep, repentance before pride, and love before anger. As St Basil teaches, common prayer preserves harmony because it brings every heart back into right order.

When our Lord walked the earth, He did not build institutions before He formed households. He entered homes—Peter's home, Martha's home, Zacchaeus's home—and wherever He was received, that home was changed. This is not accidental. The Church has always understood the family to be the seedbed of salvation, the place where faith is first learned, practiced, and preserved.

St Gregory of Nazianzus speaks tenderly of learning prayer at the knees of his parents. Before theology was written, it was lived. Before sermons were preached, they were modeled.

Children learn the faith not first by explanation, but by imitation. They learn: how their parents speak to God, how often they turn to Him, and whether prayer is central or optional. Even though our children are provided with wonderful models both in the church during our services and at home through prayer, they receive other models outside these "churches".

All too often these models do not support their spiritual growth and offer alternatives that may lead them astray. Peer pressure and social media weigh in heavily on their development.

The first Sunday of February has been designated as camp ministry Sunday. We are reminded today that there is another "little church" where our children can gather together and come closer to Christ. It is a place where social media takes a back seat to prayer with peers. Where their counselors and teachers all hold and exhibit the same Orthodox values as they do.

The programs offered there are geared to foster growth in faith and community support to all ages and abilities. They help the campers develop connections with others that support the love of Christ and the church.

First and foremost, pray for our camp and its programs, the administrators and staff, the participants, that all the work they do brings one another closer to Christ. Our diocesan family is also held together by prayer for one another.

Participate in a program- programs like Family Fest during the Labor Day Weekend are open to all people of all ages. Encourage the youth in your life to attend the programs that are appropriate for their age and needs. Help to arrange travel so that all people can make their way to All Saints Camp. We will have flyers and more information following Liturgy to learn more about the specific programs.

Consider volunteering your time- just like the parents in the example given earlier, the staff at the programs are a living example of faith in action for the participants. The programs need cabin counselors, but they also need church school teachers, helpers who set up and clean up activities, teachers for special interest classes about nature, Ukrainian culture, church singing, etc.. The camp facility can use help with maintenance, kitchen work, and more.

And of course, financial support is needed too. In order to make camp available to as many people as possible, the cost of registration does not cover the cost to run the programs. Many of the buildings at our beautiful camp are over 50 and even 75 years old, there are always maintenance needs to cover. Both the All Saints Camp facility and the programs rely on the generous donations of individuals and organizations.

Throughout the day today, more information about the Camping Ministry, including both the All Saints Camp property and the Programs the UOC of USA runs there, will be provided in parishes across our Diocese. There will be posts on social media and a live informational session on Zoom and YouTube this afternoon where you can learn more about the programs, ways to volunteer and ways to donate.

"Where two or three are gathered..." While we may not all be gathered together in one space, together we are all gathering in support of this essential ministry of our Church and God will surely be here to bless and provide abundantly for the ministry. Amen