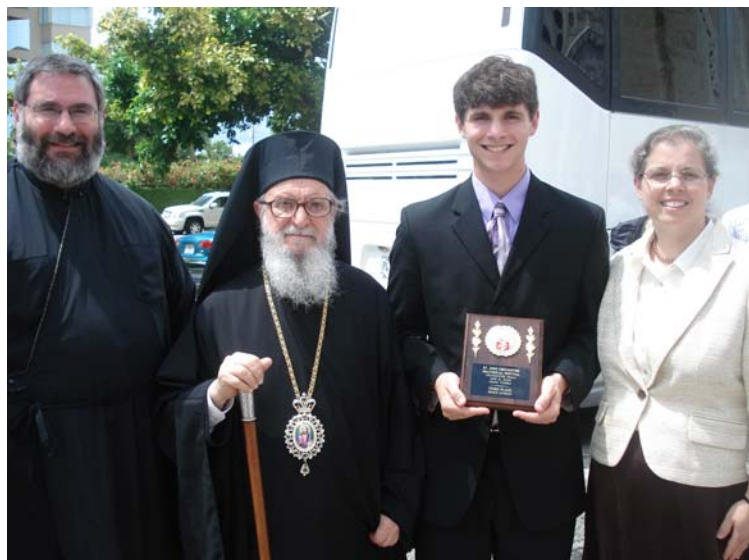


METROPOLIS OF PITTSBURGH ORATORICAL FESTIVAL PARTICIPANTS
in the
NATIONAL ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM
ORATORICAL FESTIVAL
in
MIAMI, FLORIDA ~ JUNE 2007

Miltiadis Constantine of St. John the Forerunner in Youngstown, OH recently represented the Senior Division and Cristina Dickos of Annunciation in Akron, OH represented the Junior Division at the 2007 National Archdiocesan St. John Chrysostom Oratorical Festival. The Festival was hosted by the Atlanta Metropolis with the blessings of His Eminence Archbishop Demetrios of America and His Eminence Metropolitan Alexios of Atlanta. The St. Sophia Cathedral in Miami was the host parish.

The Junior and Senior Divisions each had 9 representatives, one from each Metropolis of the country, who came together for a beautiful weekend. The speeches were presented to Archbishop Demetrios, Metropolitan Alexios, the panel of judges and all those in attendance. Miltiadis Constantine placed Third in the Senior Division and received a \$1000 college scholarship and an additional \$1200 from the newly formed Faith Endowment Fund. Cristina Dickos received Honorable Mention in the Junior Division.

Congratulations to all the participants and their families! Miltiadis speech is listed below:



Archbishop Demetrios, Fr. Tom & Pres. Vasiliki Constantine with son, Miltiadis Constantine, who placed third.



Metropolis of Pittsburgh Participants to the National Oratorical Festival: Cristina Dickos and Miltiadis Constantine

SENIOR DIVISION SPEECH

by Miltiadis Constantine, Saint John the Forerunner, Youngstown Ohio

Topic # 6: “There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came for testimony, to bear witness to the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness to the light” (John 1: 6-8)

Talk about how, through his life and his actions, St. John the Baptist bore witness to the Light, Jesus Christ.

Your Eminence, Reverend Fathers, Honorable Judges, Fellow Speakers, Brothers and Sisters in Christ, Xristos Anesti!

“Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You.” “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; Make His paths straight.’” (Isaiah 40:3). These words spoken by the Prophet Isaiah foretell the coming of a man. This man is Saint John the Baptist. He was sent by God to *prepare* the way for Jesus Christ so that all others may believe in him. St. John has a very significant role in our salvation, baptizing and preaching repentance to thousands of people.

However, the story of John began much earlier than his role as the Baptist. The beginning of his life is told in the Chapter 1 of Saint Luke’s Gospel. St. John the Baptist was chosen before his birth to become the forerunner of the Messiah. The angel Gabriel appeared to his elderly father Zacharias foretelling the birth of John and gave special instructions on his upbringing. John was already connected with Jesus Christ even before he was born. For when Mary, who had just conceived Jesus Christ, greeted John’s mother Elizabeth, the babe John leapt in her womb. After John was born, he grew up strong in spirit and moved to the desert until his time for spreading the light of Christ had arrived.

John preached the baptism of repentance and forgiveness. He taught everyone, regardless of how rich, or how poor, to repent their sinful ways. However, John’s main purpose was *not* to baptize and preach repentance, but to preach of the salvation that was to come – that is, the light of Christ. For this reason, St. John the Baptist is also called St. John the Forerunner. In many icons, he is depicted with a set of wings to show his importance as a messenger of God.

One day, In Matthew Chapter 3, John was preaching by the river Jordan, and Jesus came forth to be baptized. At first, John tried to prevent Him, saying, “I need to be baptized by You, and You are coming to me?” But Jesus answered and said to him, “Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” When John had baptized him, Jesus came up from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” (Matthew 3:13-17).

St. John is especially known for Baptizing our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ; however, what is just as important, is his crucial role in spreading the Light to the people of Israel. Saint John preached to all and was afraid of *no one*. He called the Pharisees and Sadducees a “Brood of Vipers” (Mat. 3:7) He even fearlessly criticized King Herod for taking his sister-in-law, Herodias, as his own wife. King Herod eventually had John arrested for his criticism, but he kept him alive, and in fact, enjoyed listening to John speak. Much to his dismay, Herod, bound by an oath to his daughter in law, had John beheaded.

The mission of St. John does not end here. From the time of Adam and Eve, until the time of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, every person who had sinned went to Hades after death. After John was beheaded, he too went straight to Hades. The Church teaches us that during his time in Hades, St. John continued his mission of preaching repentance and forgiveness as well as proclaiming to all of the dead that Jesus Christ was coming to save their souls.

It is evident that St. John the Baptist is a very important figure in the Orthodox Church. For example, his icon is placed right next to that of Jesus Christ on every iconostas. Jesus Christ even said that “Among those born of women, there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist.” (Matthew 11:11)

But how can we apply the life St. John to our own lives? How can we imitate his life and spread the Light? One must be a priest to baptize or hear confessions. However, one does not need to be a priest to spread the light of Christ. We can imitate St. John’s life by spreading the Light, just as he did.

Does this mean we should go out into the desert and preach about repentance? Not necessarily, there are other ways. While we are with our family or friends, we can enlighten them in the ways of Jesus Christ. While at work or at school, we can fearlessly defend the ways of the Orthodox Church.

St. John the Baptist spread the light of Christ throughout and beyond his life. There are many different ways we can spread the light of Christ as well. It is our role as Orthodox Christians us to find them.