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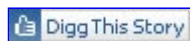
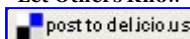
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On The Upbringing of Children as Pious and Orthodox Christians

by Archimandrite Nektarios Serfes
Boise, Idaho, USA
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"Let the little children come unto Me" (St. Mark: 14)

All Orthodox Christian parents who have babies or young children should consider very carefully how they are going to raise those children. Each one is a beloved and precious gift from God. From their first breath - indeed, from their conception - children should be surrounded by both love and prayer. Love, so that they may feel wanted and secure; prayer, not only for their physical wellbeing but for their spiritual growth. Each child - and therefore each one of us - has an inbuilt desire to know God and to love Him, so we should pray for the Holy Spirit to reside within, and progressively reveal the glory, mercy and love of our Creator.

With such a background of love and prayer, parents can move on to the next stage of Christian upbringing. It is one of the features of today's secular world that we are faced with a plethora of advice on how to raise children, and it is sad to note that in many cases the guidance given will not produce the qualities we desire, let alone offer the true spiritual Orthodox perspective. It seems that there is little available to help parents prepare their child to be a citizen of heaven! What other goal of child raising can even take a close second to this paramount objective? St Paul, writing to Titus, reveals some of the negative characteristics that we find so often in children and in the grown-ups they become:

"For we ourselves were also once foolish,



Icon of Christ Our Lord taken
His first steps

disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another." (Titus 2: 3)

The violence, abuse and bullying we encounter in the playground, the disobedience at home, the "I want it now" mentality translates into adults whose lives are both out of control and spiritually empty.

It was not so long ago that pious, Godly parents raised their children to become Saints, to serve God in this world and the next. The changes society has undergone in recent times, with its concentration on wealth, possessions, and selfishness - doing things "my way" rather than "God's way" - has led to subversive and dangerous teaching in our schools, with discipline and godliness being further undermined. Community after community can report constant battles over funding for local schools, youth activities and programs that would be beneficial. Instead, there is strife and deprivation. We must not only realise that the quality of education in our local schools - and this includes Sunday schools - is of prime importance in these difficult times. The salvation of your beloved children should be a matter of great importance for all pious, caring, Orthodox Christians. We must emphasize this again: it is one of the main purposes of any loving parent to prepare their children for their salvation through Jesus Christ our Lord and Redeemer. The enemy we have - satan - desires instead that each one of us should be eternally lost. The choice is a stark one, and we need to proclaim with confidence and certainty, "*I choose salvation through Jesus Christ*". Our children must be taught to make the same claim on their own behalf, for each Christian has an individual destiny. To hear a child say "*I belong to Jesus*" warms every parent's heart and brings joy to the angels.

Now that the children have begun to attend their local schools, and, we devoutly pray, the local parish Sunday schools, it's important that we encourage Orthodox instruction for the youth of our parish, so that they may grasp the truth. Pray with your children at home, and encourage one another read Holy Scripture and the lives of the saints. Praying together and sharing the Word of God together should be a natural and vital part of our daily living in every home. Bring your children to your local parish Church and to take Holy Communion. Learn that it's important, as your children grow older, to fast on

Wednesday and Friday. Speak to your local parish priest so that he may guide you along the path towards your own salvation and for the salvation of your most precious children.

We all have to agree that times are changing. But what has not changed, and will never change, is that our Lord God loves you and your beloved children:

"Let the little children come unto Me, forbid them not, for of such is the Kingdom of God".
[St. Mark 10:14].

We are part of an age-old struggle with the passions, the world, and the fallen spirits. We must still strive to train our own and our children's souls to the high ideal of holiness given us by Christ our Lord. *"Come, children, hearken unto me, I teach you the fear of the Lord, Who is the man who desires life? Who loves to see good days? Stop thy tongue from evil and thy lips should not speak falsely. Keep thyself from evil and do good deeds. Seek peace and follow after it. The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and His ears towards their prayers..."* (Eph. 6:4; Ps. 33:11-15)

The emphasis that lies at the heart of the parents' responsibility is to lead an active Christian spiritual life, as children learn more by example than by precept. Set out with confidence on this spiritual road with our Lord God, confident of His love and strengthening, both for yourselves and for the children He has blessed you with, and whom He loves too!

May our Lord God of mercies, have mercy on you as parents and your most precious children, as well as upon your home, and in His great goodness, pour out His abundant grace over all children.

Peace to your soul!

Humbly In Christ Our Lord,

Who prays for you!

+Very Rev. Archimandrite Nektarios Serfes
Who prays for you and with you!
USA

Content written/compiled by father@serfes.org.
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