

REJOICE ALWAYS!

1Thess 5:14-22

Youth Group Session Seven (final)

Office of Youth & Young Adult Ministry – Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA

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The early Church grew through the work of the Apostles as they traveled, spread the Gospel, started churches, and taught the faithful how to continue to grow in Jesus Christ and His Church. Their instruction was left to us in Holy Scripture because, after 2000 years, it is still meant for us to follow.

In the letter where St. Paul told the Thessalonians to "pray without ceasing," he also gave these instructions.

Respect and love the clergy and spiritual teachers, which God has put in your life. Along with your parents and godparents, God has given you bishops, priests, and other teachers to help you grow in the Faith. Often, you may not want to hear the things they tell you. Always remember that they've been given the responsibility to teach the Truth, and that doesn't change just because we want it to.

Pray for others who are feeling weak in their Faith, or who want to change the Church. Even if you don't know someone personally, always remember to pray for those who are questioning God's will or the Truth of the Church.

Be patient with everyone. Patience is an act of love!

Never pay back a wrong someone has done to you with another wrong; always look to do the right thing for yourself and for others. When someone hurts us, our first thought is usually to fight back. But this always makes the problem worse, because when we hurt another we also hurt ourselves. Say a prayer and look for a way to pay back with love!

Rejoice always. The world teaches us that we have a "right" to be happy all the time, but every life will have its problems. If we can learn to keep joy in our hearts, these problems will be easier to live through. And that joy comes from knowing that God loves you and that the Theotokos, the saints and the Church is praying for you,

In everything give thanks. We are blessed with so much that it's easy to take God's gifts for granted. We should develop the habit of thanking God as soon as we wake up for each day He gives us. Even when things in our lives don't seem to be going well, we should thank Him for the strength to work through our problems and for the people in our lives who are there to help and pray for us.

Let the Holy Spirit, Who you received at your Chrismation, continue to live in you.

Pray every day that the Holy Spirit will "come and dwell" in you.

Use your judgment to choose good over evil.

We must remember that as a member of the Holy Orthodox Church, we are a part of Christ's Living Body on earth. The only way for this Body to stay healthy and growing, is for every part to be strong. When one part weakens, it relies on the other parts to help it heal and get strong again. When each and every one of us follows the teachings of the Apostles, we not only become closer to God ourselves, we also help the keep the entire Church strong.

This is an awesome responsibility, but with the Grace of God, you will be able to take it on if you pray without ceasing!

There is a perfect example of “rejoicing always” and of always being thankful. Read the Book of Job Chapter One. What terrible things happened to Job?

Even after all of these things, what did he do and say? _____

As you continue reading the book of Job you will learn that he is tested yet again. And he still will not “sin against God with His lips.” As the story continues, Job’s friends come to talk with him about what has happened. Job begins to feel sorry for himself and his friends do not help. God comes to Job and reveals to him His greatness. In the end, Job is restored to God and God awards Job for his faithfulness by granting him more in life than he had before the tests.

How can we learn from Job? How do St. Paul’s words from the New Testament “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” relate to the Old Testament story of Job?

There are many people who find God’s beauty at what may seem a very dark time. A more recent occurrence of this is of a priest, Fr. Gregory Petroff, who was in a concentration camp in Siberia in the 1930-40’s. He wrote one of the most beautiful Akathists (songs) to praise God. The title “Glory to God for All Things”, are from the words of St. John Chrysostom as he was dying. Here is a short verse from the service:

Ikos ! – Verse

Glory to You for calling me into being
Glory to You, showing me the beauty of the universe
Glory to You, spreading out before me heaven and earth
Life the pages in a book of eternal wisdom
Glory to You for Your eternity in this fleeting world
Glory to You for Your mercies, seen and unseen
Glory to You through every sigh of my sorrow
Glory to You for every step of my life’s journey
Glory to You, O God, From age to age.

We must learn to find our own path of being able to pray without ceasing. God, as we have learned, has given us many rules and tools to aid us on our path. In the end, we must always be thankful and joyful for all God has given us and pray with all of our heart, our mind, our body and spirit to His Glory.

Glory to God for all things!