

My Beloved Ones,

During this summer period, it is a blessing to know that while many are on vacation, your Metropolis of Atlanta family is always working, especially with our young people. We are nearing the end of the fourth week of St. Stephen's Summer Camp, with one more week remaining. Each week we have been blessed to have around 100 campers and 20 staff members, including clergy and various counselors, who provide the means for our young people to have an experience that is both spiritually fruitful, as well as one that is full of fellowship.

We work very hard to create opportunities, situations, and activities which allow our young people to grow closer to our Creator. For when we build up a relationship with God, then we allow ourselves to achieve a greater and more powerful sense of spiritual understanding.

This is demonstrated in this Sunday's Gospel, where we see our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, "*...healing every disease and every infirmity among the people*" (Matthew 9:35). The Evangelist makes a point to stress that this was not simply limited to healing the blind, but that Christ also had power over the demons. The ability to cast out demons can happen when an individual truly devotes him or herself to God's Word; when he or she truly lives out His Commandments, and strives to apply God's Will to their own life.

Of course this is something that sounds, not only very difficult, but even above and beyond the abilities and logically oriented understanding of today's human beings. In essence, however, it is not so impossible; rather, it is simply a decision that we must make to give ourselves over to a lifestyle that is totally Godly oriented. This lifestyle itself was given to humanity by our Creator. Therefore, if we truly live out this Godly oriented life, we as humans will be able to move past our weaknesses, and, as I stated before, we will truly be able to grow in a closer connection to our Heavenly Father, which is the goal of all Orthodox Christians.

Therefore, I pray that we all continue to teach our young people what is Orthodox. When they return home from St. Stephen's Summer Camp, and they are filled with the desire to pray in the mornings; before meals; in the evenings; or during any occasion, I hope that you, their parents and grandparents, will continue to support this lifestyle which we give to them. Encourage them to hold fast to these practices, so that they will not simply feel close to God for only a week, but for all time.

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Metropolitan of Atlanta

