05/08/2021

# St. Sava Camp 2021 in Jackson, California – Second Week




Let us gather

“Fear not, for I am with you; I will bring your descendants from the east and gather you from the west.” Isaiah 43:5

Gathering or coming together is one of the essential activities of human beings. We are social beings created by God for interaction and fellowship. When we are together, we are given an opportunity to learn from each other as well as to learn or even discover something new about ourselves. We discover our strengths and weaknesses. We become pupils and teachers at the same time without even noticing it. Every new encounter is an occasion to grow in our faith because we are disciples of Christ.

The second week of St. Sava camp presented campers and staff with the prospect of reflecting on the previous year, which on many levels has been a year of uncertainty and new occurrences related to the Covid-19 pandemic. How did we respond to these new events and how did they affect our lives?

Gathering at camp St. Sava, helped us sort out some of our most inner thoughts, feelings and effects of life since March 2020. We did so through the lance of our Orthodox faith.

We live by faith

“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” Hebrew 11:1

Saint Paul in his letter to the Hebrews defines faith as the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen. When we come together as Orthodox Christians, we in actuality become a part of the substance of things we hope for in our life. What is that for which we hope? We might not be able to express it at first, because we haven’t developed our inner eyes or the vision to see it. This is why we wander around looking for it. Yes, our parents, who bring us to the church camp, along with everyone else who assists there, help us see it and find it. Yet, in this endeavor, they are not alone, for He Who is the One we hope and long for is helping and leading us all to Himself. Who is He? He is the Fountain of Living Waters. He is our Savior and Lord Jesus Christ. We then become a part of Him and already are, by the virtue of our baptism, members of His Body – the Orthodox Church. But, when we gather, which is the main work of God’s people, we perform the common work, service of the Liturgy, and the liturgy after the Liturgy. In other words, we live our lives according to our faith.

So, what the camp does for our children is to show them the way to the Fountain of Living Waters. It is at camp that the Lord prepares the hearts and young lives to live by the faith. The Lord removes layer after layer of worldly grime from our spiritual eyes so that we may see the evidence of things not yet seen by us.

How blessed we are for having St. Sava and St. Sebastian, among other saints, whose eyes were opened and who beheld the glory of God in their life?! They shine before us like bright stars illumining the sky and the path for us to follow.

The Lord has been at work in the life of each camper. Will they recognize that? Will they allow Him to guide them, to correct them, to carefully shape them with their distinctive characteristics that are like no one else in the world? Clearly, God created them with a purpose. As it happens, some of the volunteers at the camp are parents who attended camp as children a decade or two ago. They come to help in the camp, praying and hoping that their children will also receive that seed of faith that will blossom into a beautifully colorful flower of faith. “For with You is the fountain of life; In Your light we see light.” Psalm 36:9

We are iconographers and photographers of our life

The beginning of the second week of camp laid a good foundation for understanding some aspects of our Orthodox faith. His Grace Bishop Maxim taught the three groups of campers how to paint an icon of Christ. With his gifted and trained hands, His Grace during each session lasting about 40 minutes, demonstrated the basics of iconography. The sketching and the application of dark colors followed by layer after layer of lighter colors is synonymous to our purification and sanctification by the grace of the Holy Spirit. We are illumined children of God called to become beacons of light.

Our life has the potential to become a beautiful painting. Examples of our saints attest that God Himself is a painter of our life. We need to allow him to guide our hands as we make a stroke with a brush on the canvas of our life. What kind of painting are we going to paint?

Bishop Maxim pointed out that the iconographer, the one that writes an icon occasionally makes a mistake. The beautiful thing is that he can correct those mistakes by carefully choosing a color and the next brush stroke. In our spiritual life, this corrective measure is called repentance, the change of mind. We are given an opportunity to change our minds, that is, to repent daily. Like the father in the story of the prodigal son (St. Luke 15: 11-32), God loves and embraces us unconditionally when we repent and approach Him with a contrite heart.

This is the most uplifting reality of our life. We, together with our loving Lord, become iconographers and photographers of our life. When we photograph something, we capture the light. What light will we capture in our life? “I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness but have the light of life.” St. John 8:12

Larry Lazar Angier, the photographer of camp groups and the church life in our diocese and wider, pointed out that a photographer is a light-writer (svetlopisac).

We are iconographers and photographers of our life and our life’s stories. The album of our life’s work and photographs of our joys, struggles and growth are being stored in our hearts and are being presented to the Lord every day. So, be watchful and choose wisely what images you paint and what photographs you’re storing in your heart! Indeed, they will one day be open before the Lord Himself.

We encourage and lift each other up

It is very easy to bring someone down and to discourage him or her on the path to Christ. But to lift someone struggling to overcome addiction or disparaging thoughts, takes love, strength and a special calling. Yet, by the virtue of our baptism, we are all called to be evangelizing people. We are called to bring the good news into everyone’s life. The good news is just that – The Good News – that Christ having voluntarily gone to the cross has been raised on the third day and has ascended to heaven with His divine and human nature. Our human nature sits at the right hand of God the Father! This is the most uplifting news! We are called to share this news with each other. We are called to encourage and lift each other up with words of prayer and brotherly love. St. Paul the Apostle in his missionary work was driven by gratitude and love. “I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ; just as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in

my heart, inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace. For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ.” Philippians 1:3-8

When we are young, we are told that life is about happiness, but we often forget the second part of that ostensible reality which is joy. We can be joyful even when we are not happy. The joy comes from our Lord and our faith and trust in Him that no matter what circumstances we find ourselves in, we know that He will deliver us. “But you, take courage! Do not let your hands be weak, for your work shall be rewarded.” 2 Chronicles 15:7

The Holy Apostle Paul in his letter to Timothy said: “For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love and self-discipline.” 2 Timothy 1:7

We are called to encourage each other and lift each other up with our words and prayer to our loving Lord. Give it a try! It will totally change your life. “Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.” Joshua 1:9

We commune with our Lord and each other

“There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.” 1 John 4:18

When one arrives at camp, it is a common occurrence to hear happy and joyful campers’ voices. Children run from one activity to another. You see them playing ping pong, basketball, swimming, and even screaming as some of them might play a prank, usually on counselors. A safe and fun time is enjoyed, and memories are created. But there is an evening when all this quiets down. It is on Wednesday after Vespers when the priests have campers come for confession. This is the time when each camper and staff member descend into the deep corners of their heart, examining their life in the light of the Gospel. They reflect on their life and their relationship with God, family, neighbors and God’s creation. This evening prepares us all to encounter the Lord the following day. It becomes our own journey on the road to Emmaus. The Lord speaks to us, and we ask: “Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road.” St. Luke 24:32

This journey brings us to the Divine Liturgy – the common work of God's people. We belong to Him. We are His people. We proclaim the Kingdom of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and we participate in it with invisible hosts and saints, among them St. John Chrysostom, St. Sava, St. Sebastian and countless others. We are a part of something awe-inspiring and humbling – we are a part of Christ's Body.

Finally, the words in the fear of God and with faith draw near. We taste of the fountain of immortality. We partake of the Body and Blood of our Lord. We get united with the Lord. O come and see how the Lord is good. We are united with the Lord and with each other.

I know you by name

"But now, thus says the Lord, who created you, O Jacob, and He who formed you, O Israel: Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; you are mine." Isaiah 43:1

Camp taught us that we belong to God and each other. There are many laborers who make the camp possible. Here we recognize some by their names. First, we thank His Grace our Bishop Maxim for his archpastoral care and guidance. Our diocesan clergy among them: Fr. Steven Tumbas, Fr. Marko Bojovic and his Popadija Biljana, the local clergy of Jackson, Fr. Dragomir Tuba of Phoenix and Fr. Bratso Krsic of San Diego. Diocesan staff members and camp administrators: Protinica Rada Bojovic, Nick Salata, Mandie Kristofersen and lay directors, Henry Burge and Jelena Tasic. Our mighty kitchen chef, Miroslav Milovanovich and his crew members: Mira Tonis, Lori Ajax, Zagorka Ralic, Jovana Tvrdisic. Those who years ago were campers and now grew into wonderful counselors: Roman Vukovich, Slavko Gajic, Stefan Bokaric, Nikola Bozic, Frederic Lemonnier, Ilija Zivanovic, Nikola Zlatic, Daniel Kosanovich, Kai Nikchevic, Teodora Sutilovic, Adriana Kristoffersen, Mia Robles. Our thanks also go to svetlopisac, Larry Lazar Angier for his unique and sharp eye in photographing our campers and activities. We thank everyone else who put time and effort into the second week of camp but was not mentioned here by name. Remember, the Lord knows you by your name.

We acknowledge many parents' selfless love and sacrifices for their children. Driving many hours from their homes to the camp at the beginning of camp week and back on Saturday for a pickup is not easy. We recognize and honor your undertaking and loving care for your children in order to "bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord." Ephesians 6:4

Finding beauty in everyone and everything

“The quest for beauty is the quest for God and oneself and this is what I feel my whole life journey has been about.” Larry Lazar Angier

Final word

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will.” Ephesians 1:3-5

We ask you all, our beloved brothers and sisters, dear children of God, to take a more active part in your local parishes. Become seekers of God within the Church, pursue the Lord with your heart as He is pursuing you even with this written word. Parents, please bring your children to camp again next year. Surprise yourself and us and bring another family with you. Maybe someone whose never been to St. Sava camp. Farewell, and God’s blessing and loving embrace be with all of you, through the prayers of Saint Sava, St. Sebastian, and all the saints.










spc.rs