

SERMON ON THE SUNDAY OF ALL SAINTS OF AMERICA AND RUSSIA, JUNE 30, 2019

I recently listened to the entertainer Steve Allen describe what it was like growing up during the Depression. Most people today, especially young people, have no idea what the Great Depression was. Basically, it was a period of time in America that lasted about ten years when everyone was poor. It started in 1929 when the Stock Market crashed. I listened to Mr. Allen say that when you are poor for that long a period of time, you are a much different person than when you are middle class or rich. He goes on to describe that when he was 16 he ran away from home and travelled around the country for a few weeks. He literally faced severe hunger. He had seven dollars which provided him with exactly seven days of food. When the money ran out, it meant that he had no more food. He said that very quickly you turn into a beggar. "You might think that you would never do that, but all you have to do is get hungry enough", he says, "and you beg your brains out." Mostly he was ignored or treated with contempt. Primarily, the only people who treated him with kindness and compassion were the Mexican Americans whom he met in the southwestern states. His fellow anglophiles by and large treated him coldly and rudely. At one point he ate garbage. Mr. Allen says, "You will thank the universe for the garbage. What a thrill, I found a can with beans. After blowing away the ants in the can, I ate the nine or ten beans that I found in the can. I was ecstatic to find those beans. I was eating garbage and thrilled to do it." This, of course, is very different than the life that most of us know. Those who suffered through the Depression wanted to make sure that their children never went through that. To quote Mr. Allen, today "we have a stupid reversion of values." We make heroes out of sports figures, rock stars, politicians and entertainers. Many of them have had nine or ten husbands or wives, and their moral values often leave much to be desired. Yet they are our role models and heroes. Steve Allen believes that the real heroes are the families of America, and especially those who have had only one husband or wife in their lifetime. Our culture and society is very good at training people, but ironically the most important training that we need we often never receive. For Patch Adams, the famous physician and social activist, the most important thing we must teach our children and which by and large is not taught in school is how to love. Steve Allen points out that we train people how to fix automobiles, how to pull teeth, how to paint fences, how to do brain surgery, but we literally receive no training in the two most important roles that we will ever be called on to play: marriage partner and parent. You get thrown into the water, and you either sink or swim. One thing we don't learn, for example, is that we must spend a lot of time with our children. We think we are good parents if we provide for their material needs in abundance and tell them that we love them once in a while, but good parenting is much much more than that. We will spend tons of money on designer clothes, video games, expensive sneakers, bicycles and what have you. Our homes will be filled with all of these expensive toys. What we don't understand is that what our children crave and need the most is us—our time. They want us to spend time with them and be with them. That is more important to them than any fancy toy we can buy them. The children of public figures are at a severe disadvantage, because their parents are often away from home or on the road, and the children are raised instead by nannies and school teachers, not by their biological parents. Most parents today both work and are challenged with juggling their time between work and their families. I know that the economy is not like it was in the 1950's when dad went out to work and the wife was usually a stay at home mom and you could still get by and be a middle class family. It is not for me to judge anyone. Nonetheless, it does not change the fact that our children crave time with their parents, and marriages suffer because spouses do not spend enough time with each other. How often does it happen that one day the parent looks over his shoulder and notices that junior is on dope. Maybe the fact that junior's parents didn't see him much from two to fourteen had something to do with that. You bet it did. The thing that Steve Allen regrets most in his life is that he didn't spend more time with his children. It reminds me of the song "Cats in the Cradle" by Cat Stevens. Read the lyrics to this song and weep, especially if your children are already grown up.

It's great to raise our children to become future physicians, attorneys, baseball players, professors, or maybe even a future president of the United States. We all want them to be successful in the material sense, and of course this is important. However, our greatest and most important priority should be to raise our children to become saints. Very often, a common thread in the lives of the saints is that they were raised by pious parents. That means that their mother and/or father took them to church on a regular basis every week and more often than that, taught them to pray at home, had icons throughout the house, kept the fasts at home, read Holy Scripture with them, taught them the commandments of God, and made God the center of their lives. All these great future professionals that we are raising, are they going to find true happiness without God? I think not. It's not going to happen by magic or osmosis if they don't go to church as well as be raised in a home that is like a little church. And a half hour of Church School once in a while is a pathetic substitute for making God the center of your lives and your home into a little church. How many a famous and wealthy person, successful materially in every way possible, has died young, depressed, miserably unhappy, searching for meaning in his or her life? How many have succumbed to drugs, alcohol and eventually suicide? The aisles in the supermarket are filled with magazines containing stories like this. "What does it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" (Mark 8:36-38). Christ, love and time with your family is what it's all about. Everything else is secondary. That is how, in the words of Dr. Philip Mamalakis, we parent and raise children for the Kingdom. That is how saints are made. Amen.