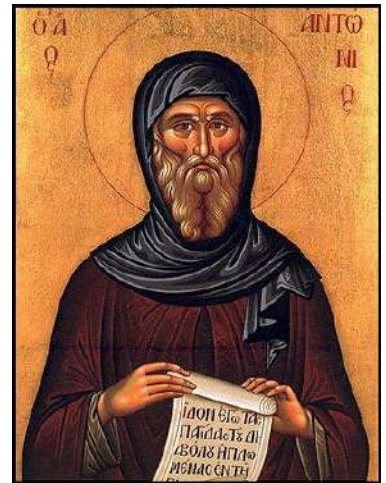


# St. Anthony's Scroll

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## Why Bother Bringing Your Young Ones to Church?

By Kh. Ramia Baba ~ *previously published in The Scroll, Volume 7 Number 12*

On my most recent trip back to Canada, I was attending the Divine Liturgy at my home parish and struggling madly to keep my children contained in a single pew. It was then that one of my closest family members, sitting behind me and observing the chaos, struck me with the question, "Why do you even bother bringing your kids to church?"

My immediate response to the challenge was, "Well, I'd like to get them used to it, and they really are getting something out of it." Right...I thought to myself. Well, he didn't seem too convinced, but his skepticism really had me thinking. Why DO we bring our littlest ones to church? What are they getting out of it? What are WE getting out of it? Isn't it just more complicated and stressful than anything? Why don't we just wait a few years until they can sit still in church? These are all very real and relevant questions to parents, so let's explore some of these issues.



Of course, we as parents are entrusted to build good habits for our children as early on as we can. Even Scripture exhorts us to do so. In the book of Proverbs we read, "Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old, he will not depart from it." (22:6) If we want Christ and

His Church to be a part of our children's lives as they grow, then we've got to bring them to Church while they are young and make it a home for them, because as the old adage goes, "Home is where the heart is." The opposite is true as well. We've got to make our own home "a little church" so that whenever we do bring our children,

it feels like and becomes an extension of home and not some foreign building they frequent once a week. Some ways this could be done are by hanging icons in our homes, saying prayers daily as a family, singing and listening to church hymns, talking about the Lord and the saints and reading the Bible.

*Cont'd on page 2*

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A large obstacle for many church-going families is keeping our children “contained” throughout the Liturgy. How do we prevent them from crying uncontrollably, running around playground-style, possibly throwing fits after restrictions have been laid down, or fighting with their siblings? If I had the answers to these questions, I would be writing a different kind of article. Very frankly, there are no easy answers, nor are there right answers. Sometimes, it is appropriate to take our children to the cry room; other times, the dust will settle right there with some intervention. All of this begs the question, however, “What am I getting out of this? Why even bother?” But herein lies the problem. We live in a culture that has become so self-focused that living selflessly is seen as a handicap. The Lord Jesus Christ, on the other hand, stands for the exact opposite way.

Living our lives for others (as He best shows us by dying on the Cross) is the greatest virtue. Of course, it is the difficult way and requires us to do work, but this is exactly what the word “Liturgy” means - WORK. So perhaps our work as parents is to bring our children to church and to struggle with all of the things that come with that endeavor. We also cannot dismiss that God sees our work, and I believe He honors our struggles and rewards us in His ways and in His time.

On a final note on why we should bother, it is important to bring our children to church because of the purity of their souls. Their innocence allows their eyes to see clearly the “the things of God.” During the Liturgy, the priest and the people are emulating the worship of God in Heaven as it has been revealed to us in the Bible. In Isaiah 6, the prophet writes in detail the things he sees in heavenly worship: God on a throne, angels, incense and a coal touching his lips (which is symbolic of Holy Communion) to name a few. These are things that actually happen in Heaven AND in every Divine Liturgy that we attend.

Though my own eyes are stained by my sinfulness and pride, babies and young children are blessed with a purity of soul and we would

be remiss not to acknowledge what they are able to perceive, in spite of how active they are throughout each service! I will conclude with a story told to me by my childhood priest. During a Divine Liturgy at the point of Holy Communion, a young boy of about 2 years old began to cry hysterically, tugging at his father and screaming, “Go get the firefighters!”

To every other onlooker, this was a boy that was having an unusual fit, because no one understood what he was really experiencing. Every adult in the room, including the priest, could tell you there was no need for any firefighter, but the little boy was seeing fire everywhere – the chalice was on fire, as was the Altar Table and a few other holy vessels in the church.

His beautiful little soul was experiencing the reality of how Scripture describes God as a “consuming fire”, and was innocently crying out for firefighters to put out that fire. For us parents, let us BOTHER to bring our young ones to church and not quench the fire of the Holy Spirit that they experience and see when they come to dwell in the House of our Lord.

**Interesting statistics about the Youth and Church:**

- 7 out of 10 youth stop attending church after High School.
- Young Adults (18-34) constitute 12% of active Orthodox Church members.

*Stats taken from [AssemblyOfBishops.org](http://AssemblyOfBishops.org)*

It's simple...if we want our children to be and remain close to the Church and to learn good habits, it's incumbent upon the parents to set the example.

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