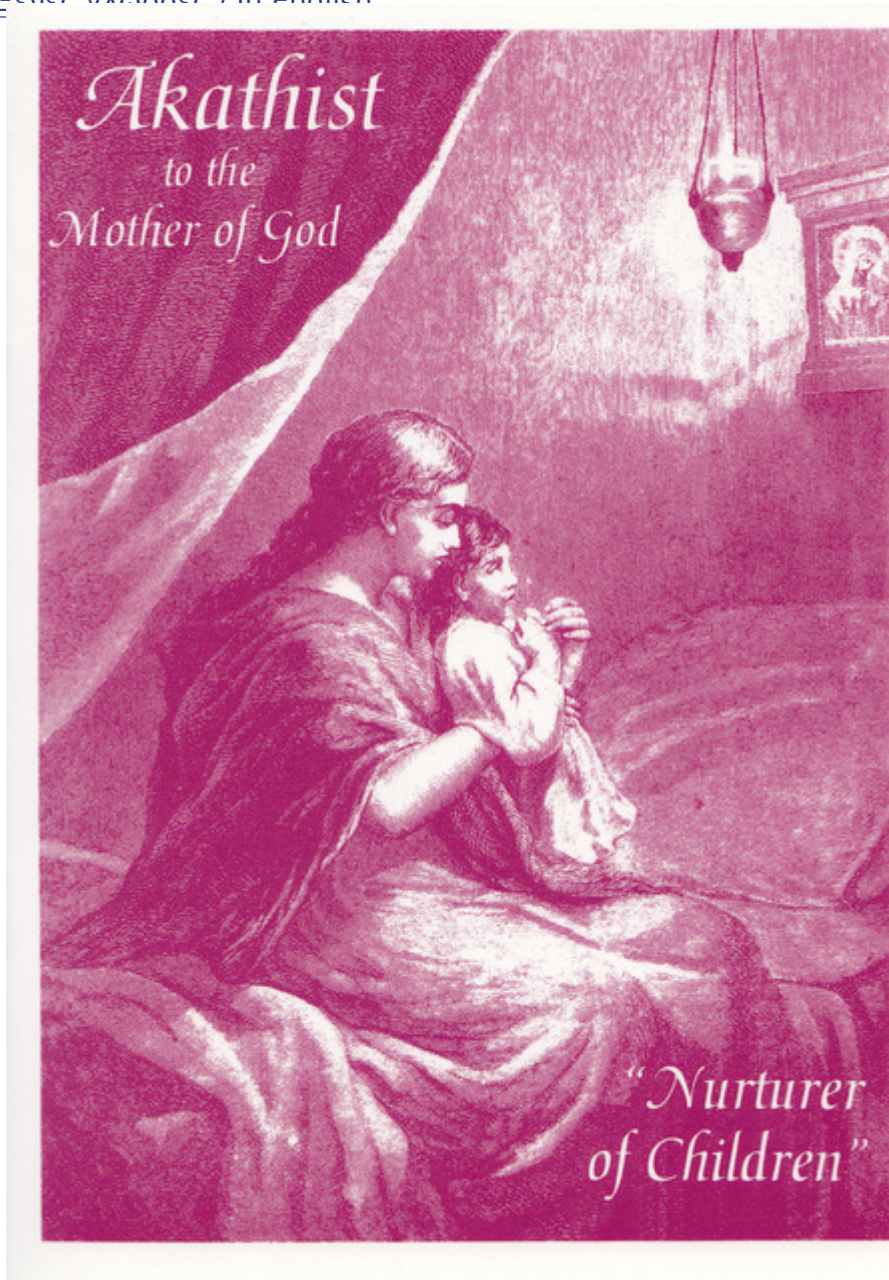


## Praying the Akathist for our Children (Virginia Nieuwsma)

Ξένος γλώσσες / In English



“Why worry, when you can pray? “ Growing up in a Christian home, I used to hear this phrase frequently. The words had even been set to music in a cheerful, upbeat

chorus. When I would hear the song as a teenager, I remember cynically thinking that it wasn't as easy as all that to not worry about things.

I struggle with the passion of imagining about the future, or analyzing the past, rather than living in the present, and so I have always worried a good deal! Prayer erases worry, aligns me with my Lord's heart, opens my eyes to an eternal perspective, and introduces me to the Kingdom of God that is within.

Nothing illustrates this better than how prayer has helped me as a mother. While one baby after another arrived in our home, it began to dawn on me that I was going to have to learn to pray, really pray, as I never had before. Messages I'd heard in my youth—"Why worry, when you can pray?" "Prayer changes things"—suddenly seemed true rather than trite. I knew that before anything else, I needed to pray for my children, or I was going to be a bundle of nerves, adrift in a sea of confusion and fear.

About nine years ago, a group of mothers in my parish discovered an Akathist to the Mother of God, called "Nurturer of Children." We banded together to pray these prayers and were greatly comforted and encouraged. While spontaneous prayer from the heart is always blessed as well, the supplications of the Church are particularly good for verbalizing exactly what it is we need for our salvation. Hear these beautiful words:

"Raise my children to be wise as serpents and as innocent as doves. Raise my children to have knowledge of good but not of sin. Raise my children to be wise against the snares of the devil. Raise my children to order their lives wisely, following the example of the saints...Raise my children, O Lady, to be made worthy of the Kingdom of Heaven, and make them heirs of eternal blessings." (Ikos Two)

Isn't it true as parents, that we want our kids to have enough knowledge of the world to be able to act in a wise manner, but not so much knowledge that they know about sin and evil in a way that is harmful to their souls? Don't we want them to be able to "order their lives wisely," deciding each and every day towards the good and the eternal, fleeing from those actions and thoughts which would damage them and lead them to do wrong?

Ikos nine of the same Akathist says, "Deliver my children from association with falsely-theorizing orators, who speak lies about Thine all-powerful intercession, and look upon me, faithfully singing: Raise my children to strongly oppose atheists. Raise my children to stand firm against God-hating teaching. Raise my children to reject the deceitful teachings of the teachers of unbelief. Raise my children to not

accept the spirit of the sons of the adversary. Raise my children to run from the world and the delusion of the world. Raise my children to turn away from evil and do good. Raise my children to love their enemies and to pray for them.”

It’s wonderful how the prayers of the Church instruct us even while we are praying them. Here one finds the perfect balance between rejecting false teaching, yet loving all people regardless of religion or status. Recently, an Orthodox friend told me of her daughter’s experience at a selective private school. A Moslem teacher on staff came into her classroom of twelve year olds, taught the children all the basics of Islam, and proceeded to lead the class in prayers to Allah! Her daughter, a baptized Orthodox girl, was very uncomfortable and didn’t know how to respond.

Our children are up against all kinds of false teaching being presented by credible voices in schools and in the media. The Protestant Christian groups tell our kids they aren’t “saved,” they don’t really know Christ, and that they are “Mary worshippers.” The teachers tell our kids the world came into being through mere chance, and that science disproves the existence of God. From every direction our children are bombarded with the message of materialism, that all of life consists in financial success and climbing the economic ladder to reach a higher level, so that one can acquire still more things.

Yet, while we pray for them that they might reject deceitful teaching, we also pray that they will “love their enemies and pray for them.” Our children may be very different from some of the people they encounter every day, but God’s desire for them—for all of us!—is that they and we would learn to love even those who oppose them. This is very difficult but it is the way of Christ, the way of the Gospel. How will any of us find the strength to do this, much less expect our children to be able to do this, unless we pray?

By Virginia Nieuwsma

Find the Akathist online here: <http://www.serfes.org/orthodox/nuturerofchildren.htm>

Order the Akathist booklet here: <http://www.conciliarpress.com/akathist-to-the-mother-of-god-nurturer-of-children.html>

