

From the desk of Fr. Matthew

The following is a transcript from a sermon offered on Sunday, August 30.

Last week, children and college students across the country went back to school for the start of another academic year. I will admit that I spent some time last week reminiscing about being a high school English teacher. There was always a lot of excitement on the first day of school: Lessons were prepared; the classroom was in order; first impressions were made. One of the things I loved about the first day of school was that students actually paid attention that day! (They didn't necessarily pay attention in the days that followed, but they paid attention that first day). They wanted to know more about their teachers. They also wanted to know what their requirements were for my class. What were their responsibilities? What did they have to do to pass the class? What were my expectations of them?

I realized after teaching that I had three categories of students: Highly Motivated, Under Achievers, and Middle of the Road. The Highly Motivated students wanted to know everything. They knew their responsibilities. They actively completed their assignments. They were well prepared for every class. Highly motivated students accounted for about 10% of the class. The Under Achievers didn't care about the class. They didn't believe the subject was important. They had poor attendance. In fact, the only reason they were there is because someone was making them. They would try to pass the tests but cared for little else. Under Achievers accounted for about 10% of the class as well. The Middle of the Road students wanted the minimum requirements to get a "B" or "C." They did the minimum work needed, nothing more and nothing less. They were good students but had their priorities placed in other areas of their lives. The Middle of the Road students represented the remaining 80% of the class.

I miss teaching high school. But I quickly learned that being a priest is a lot like being a high school teacher. I tell people now that I'm still a teacher. I just have a different curriculum and a more attentive audience. I prepare lessons. I have a lot of paperwork. I take my work home with me. I also learned that my classroom statistics were fairly close to parish statistics. In an average parish, about 10% of people are Highly Motivated; 10% are Under Achievers (unfortunately, this percentage can be larger in our Greek Orthodox parishes); and roughly 80% of parishioners are Middle of the Road.

So in the spirit of going back to school, I want to use this sermon to communicate to the majority of you who are in the Middle of the Road. Here are the minimum requirements for being an Orthodox Christian. These are non-negotiable. So as your priest, as your pastor, as your teacher, I want you to know that I mean it. These are the minimum things you have to do to be classified an Orthodox Christian: