

How to Really Raise a Child

The last hour of daylight and we're taking the children for a walk, catching the final rays of light before the sun sets behind the horizon. And she tells me about a woman she met, a fellow pilgrim at the monastery. How she grew up in communist Russia, lost her parents at an early age. Atheism all around her except the quiet presence of her grandmother.

And the interior life of this babushka radiated on her exterior gentle hope. Always with Christ, always hidden. **Always entered into the closet of her heart, door shut and living the spiritual life in secret.** And the Heavenly Father rewarded those around her, opened their hearts. Her quiet ways spoke grace clear, filled the empty spaces in a world insistent upon the absence of God.



And we're still walking and the darkness is growing, street lamps begin to glow, and she tells me how this grandmother catechized her grandchildren without ever uttering a word. Light glowing in darkness. Because owning a prayer book meant risking life, but that didn't matter because she'd memorized all her prayers. Whispers of grace filling set hours of the day, lips moving to the rhythm of inaudible words. And her grandchildren remember how during certain days of the week, times of the year, she wouldn't eat before noon and even then, only taking little. But they didn't know why because you'd be risking your life in those days to tell. Those were days when even **families lived divided, fathers fearing sons, and mothers divided against their daughters.**

There's never been a time in the history of the Church, not even in the early days of the catacombs, when so many faithful died as martyrs. Our lifetime. Six hundred bishops. Forty thousand priests. One hundred twenty thousand monastics. And we'll never know

the number of ordinary men, women, and children. And that's only to mention Russia. When curtains are made of iron, they're hard to pull back. Difficult to see what's hidden behind.

The blood of martyrs crying out from Russian soil. Don't you see how it's a blessing, pure gift, that I can write these words freely and that you can read them without fearing for our lives? That we can wear our crosses openly around our necks, attend the divine services in the daylight. Let us give thanks.

And we're walking in the dark when she tells me how that grandmother reposed as quiet as she lived. The granddaughter still remembered when she laid her to rest, how she felt that her faith had been buried with her. Orphaned in a godless world.

At that time she didn't see it. Old body returned to earth, but a seed planted deep in the heart of the one left behind, both waiting for resurrection. The pious grandmother sowing faithfully all her quiet days, leaving the fruit for others to harvest. Doing God's work by tilling the ground of her own heart. Giving the gift of faith to those around her by acquiring the Spirit of peace.

And today that woman, born into atheism and persecution, lives for the Kingdom. She learned her faith in the darkest depths of silence, the place where a seed plants so deep and secure, even the greatest storm can't uproot it.

Her pious grandmother is still speaking her words without voice. God revealing those who kept themselves hidden. Because it's not what you say, but what you do. And it's what you're doing in the quiet and the hidden that speaks the loudest.

And that thick silence is the eloquence of heaven.

Quiet word gift to my friend Georgia Mamalakis. Thanks whispered for that evening walk in the dark, filled with gladsome light.

*The statistics of Russian martyrs were taken from **Father Arseny 1893-1973: Priest, Prisoner, Spiritual Father**. Edifying spiritual reading, also **available on Kindle**.*

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Katherine Johnson is an Orthodox Christian wife and mother of seven. She is the author of the popular website [evlogia](#), a writer for Orthodox Christian Network, and the developer of the Orthodox homeschool curriculum, Ages of Grace. Her work can be found at [evlogia](#)

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