

## Orthodox Worship *Preparation, Participation, and "Etiquette"*

### **Preparing the Heart**

The time spent prior to attending Church Services will have an effect on your ability to experience God's presence through the Liturgy and prayers of the Church. Whenever possible, one should begin to quiet one's heart in preparation for arrival at Church. This is particularly the case for the Divine Liturgy. It is good to put away worldly concerns, and to come a bit early instead of "rushing" to Church. For families with children this is particularly difficult, but children can be taught about the importance of quieting down and preparing their own hearts before Church. The Jesus Prayer, for instance, may be said by the individual or family in the car on the way to services.

### **Arrival: Better Sooner Than Later**

The Ninth Apostolic Canon forbids us to arrive late at the Divine Liturgy or to leave before the end of services. The Canon states that those who do are a cause of "confusion" or scandal to others. Unless one has a specific reason to do so, it is inappropriate to stand outside the Nave (main body) of the Church Temple, or to move about the Narthex (except in certain situations, i.e. small children who may be creating a disturbance, etc.).

### **Entering the Church Temple**

Arriving early to Church allows time for lighting candles and veneration of icons, as well as the "warming" of the heart for prayer. When entering the Church, cross yourself in prayer, bow and venerate the icons at the entrance. In order not to distract others from prayer or to show a lack of reverence, do not enter or leave the Temple during:

1. The Epistle or Gospel reading;
2. During the sermon (homily);
3. During the Great Entrance;
4. During the Anaphora and Consecration of the Holy Gifts at the Divine Liturgy;
5. On all occasions when the Priest turns toward the people.

### **Conduct in the Church Temple**

All should be done in a spirit of reverence and worship with the sense that one is standing in the Presence of the Lord, the Angels and the Saints. It is therefore not appropriate to chew gum, talk unnecessarily during services, or unnecessarily distract others. One should, however, feel very much at "home" in the Temple, moving when appropriate for the sake of veneration and worship, attending to the needs of children, and welcoming and assisting guests to experience Orthodox worship.

### **Standing and Sitting in the Church Temple**

As attested to by the Scriptures, early Church Fathers, and ongoing Tradition of the Church, standing is the posture of prayer both in Church and at home. Sitting in a casual position, crossing the legs, etc. are postures of passive observance or disinterest rather than active participation, and do not reflect the most desirable reverence for the Person of Christ Himself who is present in worship. Pews were only introduced into some Protestant churches beginning in the 15th century, and only in some Orthodox parishes (primarily in America) in the 20th century. Standing is particularly appropriate at the Divine Liturgy since it is always a joyful celebration of the

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Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is true even more so on the Lord's Day, Sunday. Sitting is always understandable for the elderly, those who are ill or handicapped, and for small children, according to their ability and strength. Sitting and "resting" in Church is allowed, however, at appropriate times, which include Old Testament readings, Psalmody, and other periods of long readings. Anyone who is able should stand at the following times:

1. A Great Censing of the Temple
2. During the Gospel and Epistle Readings
3. At the Small and Great Entrances
4. During the Anaphora and Consecration of the Gifts at Divine Liturgy
5. When the Priest faces the people (e.g. at the giving of the Peace)
6. In general when the Priest comes out of the altar

*(Generally, outside of the Divine Liturgy, when the "royal doors" of the altar are opened, one should stand, as a high point in the service is about to take place)*

### **Making the Sign of the Cross**

One may trace the sign of the cross upon oneself with reverence whenever inspired to do so. However, there are specific times when Orthodox Christians typically sign themselves:

1. At the beginning and end of services;
2. Upon entering and departing from the Church Temple;
3. At every mention of the Holy Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit);
4. During the Trisagion (thrice-holy) prayers or hymn; and
5. At any prayerful invocation or blessing of God.

### **Let Us Bow Our Heads**

It is customary to bow the head or bow from the waist at certain moments during liturgical worship. The sign of the cross is not typically made at these times.

1. When the Priest exclaims, "Peace be to all";
2. At the Exclamation, "Bow your heads unto the Lord;"
3. When the Priest blesses the faithful with his hand;
4. When the Priest censes the people;
5. When the Priest bows toward the people during the services; and
6. During the Great Entrance (in reverence for the Holy Gifts).

### **Let Us Lift Up Our Hearts**

It customary in *some* parishes to lift the hands in prayer during:

1. The "Our Father"; and
2. The Anaphora when the Priest exclaims, "Let us lift us our hearts."

### **Small and Large Prostrations**

Other bodily gestures used in Orthodox worship include the small bow, or *metania*, (a bow from the waist with the hand extending toward the ground), and large bow, or *prostration* (a full bow, kneeling and place the head to the ground). It is customary to make one, or more often three metania before venerating an icon, relic or other holy thing. They may also be made at times (for instance before the reading of the Gospel) during the Divine Liturgy. Prostrations are made more often during fasting

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seasons, especially the penitential season of Great Lent (for instance with the "Prayer of St. Ephraim the Syrian"). Prostrations, however, may also be made before venerating icons, or at the Lord's prayer, and other times at weekday services (see below). The Scriptures are full of references to prostrations as a form of both veneration (of holy people or things) and worship of God.

In order to allow us to enter into the joy and victory of the Resurrection (by which God has made us to "stand upright,") the Church canons forbid penitential acts of prostration on Sundays and the fifty days between Pascha and Pentecost. Small bows (metania) may be made and, in some places or parishes, kneeling (out of a sense of awe and worship) is practiced on Sundays at the Great Entrance or during the consecration of the Holy Gifts. This canon is not to be taken merely as a legalistic rule, but expresses the spirit of the Lord's Day, which is always a celebration and participation of Christ's Death and Resurrection, through which we have received forgiveness of sins. Unless one is under a penance of some duration, it is assumed that Sacrament of Confession and prayer of absolution would have been received, if necessary, on Sunday morning before Divine Liturgy. The idea is that by the time one comes to Divine Liturgy, he/she should have taken care of the acts of repentance and reconciliation necessary to stand before the Risen Lord with a pure conscience, having received the remission of sins. The spirit of the canon seeks to remind us in a bodily way to exult in the Risen Christ through whom we "have *access* by one Spirit to the Father" (Eph. 2:18). Its purpose is to maintain the integrity of the Lord's Day, reserving the work of repentance for weekdays in preparation for Sundays.

### **Receiving Holy Communion**

Although no one should come to the Divine Liturgy late, if one does come as late as after the reading of the Gospel, he or she should not receive Holy Communion. In order to receive Holy Communion a person must:

1. Be Baptized (or Chrismated) into the canonical Orthodox Church.\*
2. Be prepared by prayer, repentance (and recent Confession), and fasting from at least 12 midnight the night before from food, drink, and smoking.\*
3. Attend Vespers on a regular basis (unless otherwise stated by your pastor).\*
4. Seek to be reconciled with fellow Orthodox Christians, particularly of the community.\*

*\* If you have any questions regarding your preparation for Holy Communion, ask your Priest.*