

Curious about Orthodoxy?

Seriously interested in inquiring into the Orthodox Faith?

Desire to join our parish?

Wish to commune?

What does it take to become a member?

Here are some things to consider: First, take a deep breath! You are on a joyful and well-worn path, together with many souls who have made this journey before you. And, many more will come after you. Let's start with the basics.

Step One: Conversion to Christ

St. Paul himself tells us what this Gospel – which means ‘Good News’ – consists of:

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. I Corinthians 15:3-8

That is the Gospel! It's the Good News preached to all nations. But what is so ‘Good’ about it? Is it really Good News? Let's have another look:

That Christ died for our sins, in accordance with the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He arose on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures and appeared to many.

Christ died for our sins. We have freedom in the Living God if we accept Him! We become inheritors of Eternal Life! What could be easier! Acceptance of the Gospel of Christ is what we call conversion. It seems elementary, but sometimes we forget what the Gospel is, and why we convert. Conversion means belief and acceptance in Jesus Christ, the God-man, as the Savior of the world [and whether we're born into the faith or come to it later in life, we all must convert our hearts!].

It's important to note that Orthodox Christians believe that we must be converted every day (not just once, but yes, every day), and that everyone must start with this step if they desire to make spiritual progress and be saved.

Step Two: Repentance

There is no salvation without repentance. We must repent of our sins, both voluntary and involuntary, of word, deed, and even thought! Repentance is

the gateway to forgiveness and the Kingdom of heaven. After this, one must find a local Orthodox Church. There is an ancient Christian saying:

One Christian is no Christian.

Therefore, to become a member of the Body of Christ means connection with other believers. Without this vital connection, Christianity becomes an interesting study or personality cult.

Furthermore, we believe that Christianity is a *living faith*, and therefore must be received from living persons. Your introduction to the local clergy and community will enrich you and benefit you in many ways. It will be a time of learning how the Church does everything from Scripture reading to prayer, fasting, tithing, almsgiving, charity, interior life and evangelism. You will make new friends, acquire new disciplines and skills that will make you a better and more loving Christian.

Step Three: The Catechumenate

When one desires to become a member of the Body of Christ, a period of instruction is necessary. From the earliest days of the Church, this was called the Catechumenate, and those wishing to join were called catechumens. This instruction is necessary because one must know the Gospel; one must know what the Church is and isn't; what

membership in the Church means, responsibilities and expectations for members and the benefits of membership; what discipleship means to believers in Christ Jesus.

Your situation is not unique. You may be making this journey of faith alone. You may be coming with your family, or with friends. You may be a clergyman, leading your flock to the Safe Haven. You may be part of a large group yearning for inclusion in the Church. Whatever your situation is, you can be assured that many have come that way before you.

The time you spend as a catechumen is time well spent. You'll not only have the chance to learn more about the Orthodox faith, but you'll also have the chance to immerse yourself into the Orthodox way of life. You may get impatient (many of us did!) for your entrance into the Church, but make no mistake, in no time, your catechumenate will have come to an end, and you'll be a member of the One, Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church once and for all!

Entry into the Church

Your entrance into the Church will culminate with the service of Baptism and/or Chrismation and receiving the Holy Eucharist.

Baptism

As commanded by our Lord Himself, we

receive baptism:

in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. (Matthew 28: 19-20)

If you are not already baptized you will receive baptism by immersion according to the command of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Baptism washes away our sins and makes us members of the Body of Christ. There is no other way to become a Christian and enter the Church. Baptism is necessary for us if we are to become disciples of Christ, and every single believer in Jesus Christ must receive baptism.

With the waters of baptism, the sins of our past are washed away, and we emerge a new creation, alive in Christ Jesus. As St. Paul says:

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death...For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. (Romans 6:3-5)

Chrismation

We are sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit through life-giving Chrismation.

(Romans 8, I Cor. 6) As St. Paul says,

But it is God who establishes us with you in Christ and has commissioned us; He has put his seal upon us and given us His Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee. (2 Cor. 1:21-22)

As baptism is a person's participation in the death and resurrection of Christ, so Chrismation is a person's participation in the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

We live life in the Holy Spirit, Who is the Giver of Life, and since there is no such thing as a 'half-Christian' all those who are baptized receive the Holy Spirit in the Mystery of Chrismation. In western Christendom, Chrismation became known as Confirmation and was moved to after the first communion.

The Orthodox Church retains the ancient practice following the type of the consecration of the Old Testament High Priest.

Eucharist

And we become partakers of Divine Nature (I Peter 1:4) by keeping the command of our Lord Jesus Christ who ordered us to "*do this in remembrance of Me.* (Matthew 26.26-28; Mark 14.22-25; Luke 22.14-19) because, as He said,

“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink.” (John 6:53-56)

There is nothing to add or subtract from the words of the Lord here. It is our great joy to obey and receive His Holy Mysteries for the sanctification and salvation of our souls.

Mystagogy

Finally, you will enter a period of time which we call Mystagogy, which means ‘initiation into the Holy Mysteries.’ This means a life of discipleship. The life of an Orthodox Christian is a life devoted to Christ in every way. Prayer, fasting, tithing, almsgiving – love in action in every part of our lives.

Above all, your life journey has not been unfruitful, and is about to begin a new and exciting chapter. This period of time is exciting as you will be participating in the Holy Mysteries, acquiring more skill with interior life, entering more deeply into the stream and rhythm of the Church’s prayer, and reaching out to your friends, neighbors and acquaintances with a deeper experience of love and charity than ever before.

Your life as a disciple of Christ will take on a deeper connection, as you learn to be spiritually watchful, applying the words of Scripture to your spiritual life under the guidance of an experienced spiritual father and guide. You’ll learn to recognize the glimmers of temptation and reject them *noetically*.

The Bible will come alive in an entirely unexpected way as you sing and pray the words of Scripture at every liturgical service throughout the year! And your experience of worship will surge into your new life as a powerful experience of heaven on earth. The Lord really does make all things new! If you ready for the journey of your lifetime, then read on.

Becoming an Orthodox Christian Catechism & Conversion

Many express interest in learning more about the Orthodox Christian Faith. We welcome everyone, including our own members, to grow in knowledge of the Church teachings and traditions.

A “catechumen” is defined as “*one receiving instruction in the basic doctrines of Christianity before admission to communicant membership in the Church.*”

You may have already decided to join the Orthodox Church. However, participating in a learning program does not obligate you to join the Church.

If you desire to enter the process of preparation, the following is an outline of the process, its guidelines and expectations.

I. Regular Church Attendance

Worship of God is at the center of Orthodox life and spirituality. Worship is not only an experience of learning but a way that God's mystical grace comes to us, touches us and changes us. A catechumen is expected to attend Sunday Divine Liturgy each week as well as special services throughout the year. Some examples of the other services are:

During Great Lent, presanctified Liturgy take place on Wednesday and Friday evenings.

During Holy Week there are services every evening, Bridegroom Services on Sun-Tue evenings, Holy Unction on Wed. evening, Holy Friday services and Pascha midnight services.

There are Great Feasts throughout the year, such as the Holy Cross (Sept. 14th), Christmas (Dec. 25th), Theophany (Jan. 6th), Pentecost and Dormition of Theotokos (Aug. 15th).

2. Instructional Classes

Orthodoxy means “correct doctrine” or “true worship.” In other words, the Orthodox Church has specific teachings and traditions regarding the nature of

God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Church; as well as what it means to be a follower of Christ and how He shapes our life as a Christian. A catechumen has the opportunity to attend the occasional Instructional Classes and weekly Bible Studies. These are announced in the Sunday bulletin. In lieu of regular classes, the priest will arrange a schedule of personalized instruction.

3. Spiritual Guidance

Our personal accountability is essential to growth in Christ along with intellectual knowledge and church attendance. The priest will help the catechumen in a spiritual self-examination to prepare for Holy Confession. The priest will also help deal with personal questions & issues that arise before and after joining the Orthodox Faith.

4. FAQ's:

How long does it take to become a member of the Orthodox Faith?

Usually, it is a nine month to year-long process. However, the priest always uses discretion to determine the readiness of a catechumen. Becoming a member is not just learning about the Faith but growing in Faith--a personal transformation must be evident. Often, this takes time and is dependent on the level of commitment of the catechumen.

If my fiancée and I wish to be married,

does the non-Orthodox spouse need to join the Church?

No, the Church does not require or force a person to join the Church. The Church will marry someone who is Orthodox with someone who is non-Orthodox. That non-Orthodox person, however, must be a Christian baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity, and they must agree in advance that any children they beget will be baptized and raised in the Orthodox Church.

When can I start receiving Holy Communion and other Sacraments?

Holy Communion and the other Sacraments (except Marriage, see above) are offered only to those persons who are baptized and chrismated in the Orthodox Church. Becoming a catechumen is the process of preparing for Baptism and/or Chrismation. After you are baptized/chrismated you participate in the Sacrament of Holy Confession and then, under the guidance of the priest receive Holy Communion and other Sacraments.

If I was baptized in another Faith/Denomination, do I need to be re-baptized?

The practice of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Church of Russia, the Orthodox Church in America and most Orthodox Churches that “*confess One baptism,*” is to not re-baptize converts. Rather, the Sacrament of Chrismation,

which is the bestowing of the Grace of the Holy Spirit, is believed to fulfill and complete the Grace that is lacking in the Baptism received outside of the Orthodox Church. A potential convert should provide proof of his/her Trinitarian baptism (done in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit) in another Faith.

Do I need to change my name?

Legally, no. Spiritually, one who is converting to Orthodoxy through baptism or chrismation is encouraged to take on a Christian or Saint’s name. The reason is two-fold. First, the saint becomes a personal example to the catechumen of how to live the Christian life. Second, the saint becomes the patron of the newly converted, praying and interceding to God on their behalf. This name would be used when participating in the sacraments of the Orthodox Church. Some catechumens may already have a saint's name, in which case it should not be changed. This is usually done in consultation with the priest.

Do I need a Godparent?

Yes, everyone who is converting to the Orthodox Faith needs a Sponsor (aka *godparent*). The sponsor must be an Orthodox Christian in good standing with the Church and approved by the Priest *before* being asked. He/she should be a model and example of

faithful church attendance and take seriously the role of sponsor. A female catechumen needs a female sponsor and likewise male for male. If the sponsor is from another parish, a letter of verification of membership in good standing from his/her parish priest is required.

Undoubtedly, you will have more questions and I hope we can answer them for you and provide a positive, edifying experience of learning and growth! +

Orthodoxy is for All People

Fr. Alexander Schmemmann

America, as every other nation, world, culture, society, is a great search and a great confusion, a great hope and a great tragedy, a thirst and a hunger. And, as every other nation or culture, it desperately needs Truth and Redemption. This means – and I write these words knowing how foolish they sound – that it needs Orthodoxy. If only Orthodoxy is what we believe and confess it to be, all men need it whether they know it or not, or else our confession and the very word Orthodoxy mean nothing.

And if my words sound as an impossible foolishness, it is only because of us, Orthodox. It is our betrayal of Orthodoxy, our reduction of it to our

own petty and selfish “*national identities,*” “*cultural values,*” “*parochial interests*” that make it look like another “*denomination*” with limited scope and doubtful relevance. It is looking at us, Orthodox, that America cannot see Orthodoxy and discern any Truth and Redemption.

And yet it is clear to everyone who wants to see that there are today around us thousands of ears ready to listen, thousands of hearts ready to open themselves – not to us, not to our human words and human explanations, not to the “splendors” of Byzantium or Russia, but to that alone which makes Orthodoxy, which transcends all cultures, all ages, all societies, and which makes us sing at the end of each Liturgy: “*We have seen the true Light, we have received the heavenly Spirit, we have found the true Faith...*” And if only we could understand this and take it to our hearts and our will, day after day, there would be no problem of Orthodoxy, but only a mission of Orthodoxy in America. +

“Greek” & “Rum” Orthodox

An excerpt from the inaugural press conference of His Eminence Elpidophoros on June 21, 2019

The GOA of America has about 1.5 million Orthodox. Not all members are Greek because this archdiocese serves all

Orthodox.

The Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America doesn't mean it has only Greek as its faithful. This is because it's under the Ecumenical Patriarchate which is not a 'Greek' Patriarchate in the narrow sense of the word but in a broader sense. In Turkish we call it '*Rum*'. Rum has a larger sense and it isn't a national description. It's not a nation, it's a *right*.

For instance, take the phrase 'Roman Catholic'. You cannot translate 'Roman Catholic' as 'Italian Catholic'. In the same way that you cannot translate 'Rum Orthodox' as 'Greek Orthodox', that's why our Patriarchate is called Ecumenical.

The word 'Rum' is equivalent to the word 'Ecumenical' because it means the Rum is a citizen of the Roman Empire, not the Greek Empire, and it possesses two characteristics: the Greek culture and language, and the Orthodox Faith. These are the characteristics of the Ecumenical Patriarchate that it safeguards in America as well.

SOURCE:

<https://www.facebook.com/ecumenicalpatriarchate/videos/1161361690733574/>

Additional Thoughts

The Orthodox Church has a universal

appeal and vocation. She does not restrict membership to people of any particular culture, race, class, or section of the world.

Indeed, Orthodoxy values the diversity of cultures, peoples, and languages which are part of her life. She also affirms a unity of faith and love in Christ which transcends all artificial barriers. Membership in the Orthodox Church is open to all persons.

The Orthodox Church in the United States is no longer considered to be an immigrant Church, and the overwhelming majority of her members have been born in the United States.

In fact, 50% of her members were raised in other religious traditions and have chosen to become members of the Orthodox Church (25% in the GOA).

This reality was clearly recognized by His Eminence Archbishop Iakovos, former archbishop of North and South America, when he told the Twentieth Biennial Clergy/Laity Congress of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese that: *"Orthodoxy is not exclusively the religion of the Hellenes, but the religion of all those who ... have come to know and relate to it."*

This is an exciting period in the development of Orthodox parishes in

the United States. And while many can still be associated with a particular cultural heritage, most completely recognize the responsibility of Orthodoxy to the wider society.

Please keep in mind that when you embrace the Orthodox Church, you also join a local parish. It is meant to be a spiritual family. Therefore, you should thoughtfully examine the concerns and priorities of the parish. Try to discover whether you will feel comfortable, whether the parish can provide you with the opportunity to grow closer to God and to be of responsible service to others. +

What is Biblical Worship?

By Robert Arakaki

Orthodox Christian worship is distinctive and perhaps even surprising for those who have only been exposed to contemporary Christian worship. The contrast can be rather surprising, along with many questions, such as:

Does it really matter how we worship?

Does God care at all when it comes to “worship styles?”

Why is your pastor called “priest” and not just “pastor?”

Why does he turn his back to the people most of the time?

Why does he wear vestments rather than regular clothes?

Why do the people stand so much?

What about people making the sign of cross so often?

Where are the musical instruments?

Why use only the human voice and not guitars with drums?

Do you really have to use incense?!

Where do these worship services come from?

Do all Orthodox Churches have the same services all over the world?

Do you really need to have the Eucharist/Last Supper every Sunday?

Rediscovering WORSHIP

Are human beings supposed to create, invent their own forms of worship? In the Bible, God revealed the “pattern” to Moses and the Prophets after him as they saw the Eternal Worship that always takes place in the Heavens. The angels participate in it: we are called to enter that eternally existing pattern of worship, not to invent our own.

We know how God’s people in the Old Testament worshiped, and we know how God’s people in the early Church worshiped too because we have writings from eyewitnesses covering the first 400 years. And it was a time of persecution during which the ancient Church preserved and finalized the Bible.

But contemporary Christianity, especially in America, has become increasingly disconnected from the biblical heavenly pattern of worship, so much that “worship” often means an uplifting rock concert with a catchy message. As a result, the Eucharist or Lord’s Supper, once the constitutive moment of ‘being the Church,’ is becoming rare or optional. Lost is any sense of an ascent to the pre-existing pattern seen by Moses, Isaiah, Ezekiel or John in the book of Revelation; it is replaced by a people-and-culture-centric gathering. Yet, through new eyes, the ancient church invites you to rediscover biblical worship and what “*on earth as it is in heaven*”

also means.

According to the Pattern

First, we need to ask: Is there a guiding principle for right worship? St. Stephen, the first martyr, gave a sermon about the history of the Jewish nation. In this sermon he notes that Old Testament worship was “*according to the pattern.*”

Our forefathers had the tabernacle of the Testimony with them in the desert. It had been made as God directed Moses, according to the pattern he had seen. (Acts 7:44 NIV). This phrase comes up again in the book of Hebrews:

They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle: “See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.” (Hebrews 8:5 NIV)

The phrase is a reference to Exodus 24:15-18, where Moses spent forty days and forty nights on Mt. Sinai. There he was in the direct presence of God receiving instructions about how to order the life of the new Jewish nation. Thus, the guiding principle for Old Testament worship was not creative improvisation nor adapting to contemporary culture but imitation of the heavenly prototype.

The next question is: What is the biblical pattern for worship? In Exodus 25 to 31, Moses received instruction concerning the construction of the Ark of the Covenant, the Tabernacle, the lamp stand, the altar for burnt offerings, the altar for incense, the anointing oil, the vestments for the priests, and the consecration of the priests. The principle of “*according to the pattern*” was repeated several times in the design specifications for the Tabernacle (Exodus 25:8, 25:40, 26:30, 27:8). This was the template for the spiritual identity of the Jewish people. To be a faithful Jew meant that one offered to God the proper sacrifices in the prescribed manner.

Despite the clearly laid out instructions in Exodus and Leviticus, the Israelites struggled to keep to the biblical pattern of worship. The struggle to maintain the right worship of Yahweh in the face of temptations to follow the idolatrous ways of the non-Jewish nations is a theme running through Old Testament history.

The sin of the golden calf in Exodus 32 was not the sin of heresy (wrong doctrine), but the sin of false worship.

When the northern tribes broke from Judah, Jeroboam did not create a new theology, instead he had two golden calves made and appointed non-Levites to be priests as a way of consolidating

his rule (II Kings 12:25-33).

II Chronicles is a history of the struggle to maintain fidelity to God by holding to the biblical worship. II Chronicles 21 to 24 relates how a bad king — Jehoram — led the Israelites astray through Ba'al worship and a good king — Josiah — brought them back through the restoration of the Passover sacrifice.

Apostasy in Old Testament times meant abandoning God for other gods and the chief means was the sin of idolatry (wrong worship). The lesson here is that right worship was critical for a right relationship with God.

Thus, 'orthodoxy' — right worship — in the Old Testament meant keeping to the pattern of worship that God revealed to Moses on Mt. Sinai. Right worship was also key to Israel's covenant identity.

This suggests that right worship is key also to our Christian identity. By studying how worship was defined in the Old Testament and comparing it with the Orthodox liturgy we can better understand why Orthodox worship is the way it is and how contemporary worship has strayed far from biblical worship.

Where Does Orthodox Worship Come From?

Worship in the Orthodox Church is patterned after the Old Testament

Temple. Typically, an Orthodox church has three main areas: the narthex (entry hall), the nave (the central part), and the altar area. This is similar to the Old Testament Tabernacle which consisted of the Outer Court, the Holy Place, and the Most Holy Place (Exodus 26:30-37, 27:9-19; I Kings 6:14-36; II Chronicles 3 and 4).

The layout of Orthodox churches may seem strange to those who attend contemporary-christian-worship services, but it is patterned after the Old Testament Temple. As a matter of fact, Orthodox church buildings are often referred to as temples.

When we enter an Orthodox Church, we are entering into sacred space much like the Old Testament Tabernacle. When I go to an Orthodox church on Sunday, I enter the narthex, a small entry room. I light a candle in front of the sacred image of Jesus Christ and commit my life to Christ in preparation for worship. The short time I spend in the narthex helps me to shift my mind from the world outside to the heavenly worship inside.

Then I enter the nave, the large central part of the church building where the congregation gathers for worship. All around me I see sacred images of Christ, the saints, and the angels. This is patterned after the Jewish Temple which

had images of angels, trees, and flowers carved on the walls (I Kings 6:29; II Chronicles 3:5-7).

Up in the front is a wall of sacred images (the iconostasis). In the middle of this wall is a door with a gate across it. This wall of images is patterned after the curtain that separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place in the Jewish Temple (Exodus 26:31-33; I Kings 6:31-35).

Behind this is the altar area where the Eucharist is celebrated. Just as the Jewish high priests offered sacrifices in the Most Holy Place at the Jerusalem Temple, the Orthodox priests offer up the spiritual sacrifice of Christ's body and blood at the altar. The altar area also symbolizes Paradise, the Garden of Eden, where Adam and Eve enjoyed deep communion with God before the Fall.

We receive Holy Communion in front of the altar reminding us that we have been restored to communion with God through Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross.

Orthodox worship is also patterned after the worship in heaven. At the start of the second half of the Divine Liturgy the church sings:

*Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord of Hosts,
heaven and earth are full of your*

glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.

This is a participation of the heavenly worship described in Isaiah 6:3 and Revelation 4:8. For the Orthodox Church this point of the Divine Liturgy is not so much an imitation as a participation in the heavenly worship.

Another way Orthodox worship is patterned after the heavenly worship is the use of incense. Incense was very much a part of the heavenly worship. In his vision of God, Isaiah describes how as the angels sang: "*Holy, Holy, Holy*", the doors shook and the temple in heaven was filled with incense (Isaiah 6:4).

The Apostle John in Revelation describes how the angels in heaven held bowls full of incense and how the heavenly Temple was filled with incense smoke (Revelation 5:8, 8:3-4, 15:8).

The vestments worn by Orthodox priests are patterned after the Old Testament and the heavenly prototype. The entire chapter 28 in Exodus contains instruction on the making of priestly vestments. In heaven, Christ and the angels wear the priestly vestments (Revelation 1:13, 15:6). The vestments are more than pretty

decorations, rather they are meant to manifest the dignity and the beauty of holiness that adorns God's house.

Old Testament Prophecies of Orthodox Worship

Orthodox worship is more than an imitation of Old Testament worship. It is also a fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. The Old Testament prophets besides describing the coming Messiah also described worship in the Messianic Age. Within the book of Malachi is a very interesting prophecy:

My name will be great among the nations, from the rising to the setting of the sun. In every place incense and pure offerings will be brought to my name, because my name will be great among the nations, says the Lord. (Malachi 1:11)

The phrase *"from the rising to the setting of the sun"* is a poetic way of saying from east to west — everywhere. Here we have a prophecy that the worship of God which was formerly confined to Jerusalem would in the future become universal.

This was confirmed by Jesus in his conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well. In response to her question whether Jerusalem or Mt. Gerizim was the proper place for worship (John

4:19), Jesus answered that in the Messianic Age true worship would not depend on location but on worship of the Trinity. His statement about worshipping the Father in spirit (Holy Spirit) and truth (Jesus Christ) (John 4:23-24) is a teaching that true worship is worship of the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

What is striking too about Malachi's prophecy is the reference to incense. Where before incense was offered in the Jerusalem Temple, in the Messianic Age incense would be offered by the non-Jews. One of the most vivid memories many first-time visitors have of Orthodox worship is the smell of incense.

Incense is burned at every Orthodox service. In the Roman Catholic Church incense is used in the high Mass but not in most services. Most Evangelical and Pentecostal churches do not use incense at all. Thus, whenever an Orthodox priest swings the censer and the sweet fragrance fills the church one experiences a direct fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy.

Some may complain about how strange incense is, but they should realize that the use of incense was an integral part of Old Testament worship and is one of the key markers of authentic biblical worship in the Messianic Age.

Malachi's prophecy about "pure offerings" is a reference to the Eucharist. The Jewish rabbis taught that when the Messiah comes all sacrifices would be abolished except for one, the *Todah* or Thanksgiving sacrifice.

This was fulfilled in the sacrament of the Eucharist, that is, the last supper Christ had with his followers when he gave thanks over the bread and the wine (Luke 22:17-20).

The word "eucharist" comes from the Greek word *ΕΥΧΑΡΙΣΤΕΙΝ*, meaning: to give thanks. Jesus' statement about the cup of the new covenant meant that he was about to inaugurate the Messianic Age. The Eucharist is a remembrance of Christ's death on the cross as well as a participation in Christ's body and blood (I Corinthians 10:16-17).

Thus, the Eucharist — the pure offering — is another key sign of right worship in the Messianic Age.

In the last chapter of Hebrews is a strange verse that many 'modern Christians' skip over:

We have an altar from which those who minister at the tabernacle have no right to eat (Hebrews 13:10).

What the author is asserting here is that the priests and Levites working at the

Jerusalem Temple have no access to the Christian Eucharist. The Eucharist is only for those who confess Jesus as the promised Messiah and his death on the cross as the ultimate Passover sacrifice. Besides this, the reference to the altar tells us the early Christians celebrated the Eucharist on real altars and that they had priests.

In the early Church if one did not confess Jesus as Christ, one could not receive the Eucharist. Contemporary Protestant worship on the other hand welcomes everybody and makes no distinction between believers and nonbelievers in its worship. In short, the early Church's worship style was radically different from contemporary non-Orthodox churches that have dispensed with the altar and the idea of the Eucharist as a spiritual sacrifice. To those who advocate contemporary worship, the Orthodox Christian can reply: We have an altar, where is yours?

For the Apostle Paul the Eucharist was just as important as the Gospel message. As he went about planting churches across the Roman Empire, Paul taught them the Good News of Jesus Christ and how to celebrate the Eucharist. This can be seen in Paul's formal phrasing: "*For I received from the Lord what I also pass on to you. . .*" [I Corinthians 11:23] for the Eucharist and in I Corinthians 15:3 for the Good

News (Gospel). Paul's phrase: "*What I received from the Lord...*" parallels that in Exodus 25:9: "*exactly like the pattern I will show you.*" The infrequent celebration of the Eucharist in heterodox worship shows how far they have moved from historic Christian worship.

Another prophetic sign of worship in the Messianic Age is the priesthood. The last chapter of Isaiah contains a prophecy about the time when knowledge of God would become universal among the Gentiles and God would make priests of non-Jews.

And I will select some of them also to be priests and Levites, says the Lord. (Isaiah 66:21 NIV)

Part of this great ingathering would be the consecration of Gentiles to the priesthood. This was fulfilled when Jesus gave the Great Commission to the apostles (Matthew 28:19-20). Paul understood his work of evangelism as a "*priestly duty*" (Romans 15:16).

In Isaiah is another prophecy about the important role that the Gentiles would play in the rebuilding of Israel, that of the establishment of the New Israel, the Church.

They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated; they will renew the ruined cities that have

been devastated for generations. Aliens will shepherd your flocks; foreigners will work your fields and vineyards. And you will be called priests of the Lord, you will be named ministers of our God. (Isaiah 61:4-6 NIV)

Isaiah's prophecy could be understood to refer to the Jews' return from Babylon in 538 BC, but the fact that non-Jews would be part of the rebuilding process is an indication that the prophecy points to the coming of Christ.

At the first Church council, St. James, the Lord's stepbrother, quotes from the prophet Amos in defense of admitting non-Jews into the Church:

After this I will return and rebuild David's fallen tent, its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it, that the remnant of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who bear my name, says the Lord, who does these things that have been known for ages. (Acts 15:16-17 NIV; Amos 9:11-12)

The key to understanding Isaiah's prophecy about the priesthood is that a priest does not stand alone but in a certain context: temple, altar, and sacrifice. This pattern of priesthood, temple, and sacrifice can be found in I Peter 2:5:

...you also, like living stones, are being

built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (NIV).

The Apostle Peter reiterates the teaching that the Church is a “*royal priesthood*” in I Peter 2:9. This can be seen in the fact that the early Christians celebrated the Eucharist regularly on the first day of the week, Sunday. The early Christians understood the Eucharist to be a spiritual sacrifice and had priests to lead them in worship.

Today, two thousand years later, the Orthodox Church still has priests standing at the altar offering the eucharistic sacrifice. Contemporary worship has none of these. Thus, Isaiah 61:6 finds its fulfillment in Orthodox worship, not contemporary worship.

Some may object to the Orthodox Church having priests on the grounds that because of Christ we have no need for a man to serve as a mediator with God.

This objection is based upon a misunderstanding of the nature of Orthodox worship and the office of the priest. Basically, the priest’s role is to lead the congregation in worship.

If one listens carefully to the litanies one finds the priest addressing the

congregation, “*For . . . let us pray to the Lord*”, and the congregation responding with, “*Lord have mercy*”. In other words, the congregation prays with the priest, not through the priest.

As a matter of fact, in Orthodoxy the priest cannot begin the Divine Liturgy unless the laity is present. This is based on the Orthodox Church’s understanding that the priesthood resides in the whole church, not just in the ordained clergy. The participation of the laity is just as critical for right worship as the clergy. This can be seen in the fact that “liturgy” comes from the Greek *λειτουργεια*, “leitourgeia,” which means worship and the “work of the people.” Jesus Christ is our Mediator and he exercises that ministry through his office as the great High Priest. This means it is imperative that we be part of the Divine Liturgy and not off doing our own thing.

Some may cite I Peter 2:5 as a repudiation of the priesthood. This interpretation relies on the illogical reasoning that since we are all priests, then no one is a priest.

This reading of I Peter 2:5 has resulted in churches without priests and altars. Historically the Christian Church has recognized the offices of deacons, priests, and bishops, and the practice of an ordained clergy has roots in the New

Testament Church.

We read in Acts 1:20, “*Let another take his office*” (NKJV, see also I Timothy 5:17-22, II Timothy 2:2). Where for over a thousand years Christianity had priests celebrating the Eucharist on altars, after 1500 there emerged a new form of Christian worship that disavowed the priesthood and removed the altar from the sanctuary.

Anyone who compares Orthodox worship with contemporary worship will be struck by how biblical Orthodox worship is and how far contemporary worship has moved away from the Old Testament pattern.

When we take into consideration the Old Testament prophecies, the significance of liturgical worship in Orthodoxy becomes even more compelling. Orthodox worship follows the pattern of Old Testament worship and is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies.

This is the worship God wants in this day and age. Orthodox worship took the Jewish synagogue and Temple worship and made them Christocentric.

Where Does Contemporary Worship Come From?

The classic shape of Christian worship consists of two parts: the liturgy of the

word and the liturgy of Holy Communion. This was the way all Christians worshiped until the Protestant Reformation in the 1500s when Martin Luther and his followers rebelled against the Roman Catholic Papacy.

It should be kept in mind that over the years the Pope had introduced changes like the *filioque* clause and the dogma of *transubstantiation* with the result that the Roman Catholic worship diverged from that of the early Church.

The Protestant Reformers sought to reform the church but the result was not a return to the historic pattern of worship. The Protestant teaching “the Bible alone” resulted in the sermon becoming the center of worship. Priests were replaced by Bible expositors, and the altar was replaced by the podium. This marked a decisive break from the historic form of Christian worship.

But the break from historic worship did not end there. In the early 1800s a more emotional and expressive form of worship became popular on the American frontier. Then, in the early 1900s Pentecostalism emerged with its emphasis on the baptism in the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues, and other charismatic manifestations.

Where mainstream Protestantism

stressed sober singing and the rational reading of the Bible, Pentecostalism stressed ecstatic worship and experiencing the Holy Spirit. For a long time, Pentecostals were relegated to the margins of Protestantism and were derided as “holy rollers.” Then in the 1950s Pentecostalism began make inroads among mainline Protestants, and in the 1960s among Roman Catholics. Less demonstrative and theologically more sophisticated, this movement came to be known as the charismatic renewal.

Pentecostalism was just one of three movements that would radically transform American Protestantism in the second half of the twentieth century.

Just as influential on Protestant worship was pop music popularized by music groups like the Beatles. The pop culture of the 1960s shaped in profound ways the values and outlooks of the baby boomer generation. A cultural gap widened between the more traditional church services that relied on organs or pianos and had traditional hymns, and the more contemporary church services that used guitars and sang simpler and catchier praise songs. Many churches were split as a result “worship wars” — hymns and organs versus praise bands and praise songs.

The third influential movement was the

church growth movement. Though less visible to the public eye, it influenced the way many pastors understood and ran the church. The church growth movement brought market analysis and business techniques to the way the church was run. With the introduction of the concept of the seeker friendly church, church worship moved away from edification of the faithful to evangelizing outsiders. Numerical growth was seen as proof of God’s blessing. This is exemplified by mega churches packed with thousands of enthusiastic worshipers.

However, despite its good intentions the church growth movement introduced several serious distortions.

Worship of God often became spiritual entertainment. The sermon shifted from an exposition of Scripture to selecting Bible verses to support teachings on how to live a fulfilling life.

In seeking to tailor the Christian message to non-Christians many pastors have dumbed down their message with the result that many of their members know very little of the core doctrines. Just as troubling is the fact that many churches have become spiritual machines that rely more organizational techniques, high tech electronics, and social psychology than the grace of the Holy Spirit.

In short, Protestant Christianity has undergone a major uprooting as a result of the influence of Pentecostalism, contemporary Christian worship, and the church growth movement. As a result of this massive uprooting, Evangelicalism has become rootless. This uprooting of Evangelical worship has created an opening for many new teachings and new styles of worship.

What Would the Apostle Paul Think?

If the Apostle Paul were to walk into an Orthodox liturgy, he would immediately recognize where he was — in a Christian church. The key give away would be the Eucharist. This is because the Eucharist was central to Christian worship. In the days following the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost the early Christians met in homes and celebrated “*the breaking of bread*” (the Eucharist). Paul received his missionary calling during the celebration of the liturgy (Acts 13:2 NKJV). He made the celebration of the Eucharist a key part of his message to the church in Corinth (I Corinthians 11:23ff).

If Paul were to walk into a traditional Protestant service with the hymn singing, the reading of Scripture and the lengthy sermon he might think he was in a religious service much like the Jewish synagogue. He may not have much trouble accepting it as a kind of

Christian worship service, although he might question their understanding of the Eucharist.

However, if the Apostle Paul were to walk into a mega church with its praise bands and elaborate worship routine, he would likely think he was at some Greek play and seriously doubt he was at a Christian worship service.

If the Apostle Paul were to walk into a Pentecostal service, he would probably think he had walked into a pagan mystery cult that had no resemblance at all to Christian worship.

Why Orthodox Worship?

A non-Orthodox might ask: What difference does it make to God how we worship? The better question would be: What does the Bible teach about worship? Does the Bible teach it makes a difference how we worship God? The answer is God does care about the worship we offer Him. We read in I Peter 2:5:

...you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (NIV).

This concern for proper worship goes all the way back to Leviticus 22:29:

When you sacrifice a thank offering to the Lord, sacrifice it in such a way that it will be accepted on your behalf (see also Leviticus 19:5) (NIV).

If we are instructed to offer “acceptable” sacrifices, this implies we can offer improper worship that will be rejected by God.

We see this in Genesis 4:3-5 where Abel and Cain offered sacrifices to God, and one was accepted and the other rejected.

It can also be seen in Leviticus 10:1-3 where Aaron’s sons, Nadab and Abihu, died because they offered unauthorized fire to Yahweh.

In I Chronicles 13:8-10, Uzzah, a non-Levite, died because he touched the Ark of the Covenant that only Levites were allowed to handle (I Chronicles 15:11-15, Numbers 4:15).

In II Chronicles 26:16-20, King Uzziah sought to offer incense to God, something only the priests could do, and suffered divine punishment. Thus, there are consequences for not offering right worship.

In this day and age, the consequence of wrong worship is less dramatic. To offer wrong worship is to be outside the Orthodox Church and unable to receive the Eucharist. Yet, if salvation is about a

right relationship with God then worship plays an important part in having a right relationship with God.

Before the Fall, Adam and Eve enjoyed unbroken communion with God; after the Fall they became alienated from God and mankind has suffered as a result. Nevertheless, God has been at work throughout human history working to bring us back into fellowship with him.

This work of restoration reached its climax with the coming of Christ (Hebrews 1:1-2). The author of Hebrews stresses that Jesus Christ is the High Priest of the New Covenant (5:7-10; 9:9-14) and as a result of His death on the cross we are able to enter into the Most Holy Place (Hebrews 10:19-25) and take our place in the heavenly worship (Hebrews 12:22-24).

In Revelation 7 is a description of the great ingathering of the Jews and the Gentiles in worship at the throne of God.

Our ultimate destiny is not to be Bible experts but to be in communion with God. This can be seen in a strange verse in Exodus 24:7:

...they saw God, and they ate and drank.

In ancient times, after a covenant was

ratified, the ruler and his subjects would sit down for a common meal. Eating together was a sign of fellowship and their common life together. This verse finds its fulfillment in the Liturgy when we feed upon Christ's body and blood in the sacrament of the Eucharist (John 6:53-56).

The heavenly worship described in Revelation is not in some far-off future but can be experienced in the Sunday liturgy in an Orthodox church. In Revelation 22:3 we read:

And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face and His name shall be on their foreheads (NKJV).

The Greek word "serve" (*λατρευειν*) can also be translated "worship." As we stand in worship facing the altar, we behold the throne of God; this is because the altar, like the Ark of the Covenant, is where God's presence dwells. The phrase we shall see God "face to face" finds its fulfillment when we face the altar looking at the icon of Christ the Pantocrator (the All Ruling One). The icon is more than a religious picture, it is also a window into heaven.

Lastly, "*His name shall be on their foreheads*" is fulfilled in the Orthodox

sacrament of chrismation where the priest anoints the foreheads of converts with sacred oil forming the sign of the cross. Every Orthodox Christian has this spiritual seal on their forehead as a sign of their belonging to Christ.

Thus, it is not Orthodox worship that is so strange and different but contemporary worship. Orthodox worship only seems to be strange because it is not of this world. It is part of the worship of the eternal kingdom.

We as Orthodox Christians need to appreciate what a precious gift God has given us in the Divine Liturgy. We should become fervent in our prayers and our commitment to following our God and Savior Jesus Christ. We need to recognize that much of the attraction of contemporary worship comes from the fact it has taken the best the world has to offer but in so doing it has abandoned the orthodox, or right worship, God wants from us. The best response an Orthodox Christian can make to an invitation to visit a contemporary worship service is: "*Come and see!*"

Many people today don't know about the Orthodox Divine Liturgy and are hungry for a real worship experience. They need someone to invite them and be ready to explain how the Orthodox liturgy is the true worship taught in the Bible. +

This is the Christian Mystery

Selected Excerpts from the Talks of the Elder Archimandrite Aimilianos

The fact of entering the church is the greatest privilege a Christian can have. We live here the grace of God. We live our salvation, the fruits of the work of salvation of our God, the High Priest!

Here in the church, we can interpret that word which the Apostle proclaims: Christ “*entered once for all into the Holy of Holies by means of His own blood*”. [Hebrews 9:12] Thus securing redemption, He lives for us, prophesies and exalts His hands to the Heavenly Father.

What does this mean? Christ poured out His blood once. He entered the Holy of Holies once! And from that day on He never stopped remembering us before His saints, so they intercede for us before the Heavenly Father, and especially His Mother, Our Most Holy Virgin, for us, for our hearts, for our sins, for our pains, for the disappointments of our lives.

He went to Heaven once and forever. He didn't fall from the throne he sat on, to the right of His Heavenly Father.

So, what does that mean? It means when we go to church in order to attend the Divine Liturgy, this is not an ordinary

practice, it is not something that “does not matter! I will come tomorrow and the day after tomorrow...” It is a unique act! We go to the One whom we loved! To Him who gave His life for us! To Christ!

But where is Christ? Here is Christ! Here also!

But, basically, the Second Person of the Trinity, our Christ is on the right of the Heavenly Father in the Holy of Holies.

Therefore, my dear, do not think that when we enter the church, we enter and leave, and then we enter again. No! We climb and enter the Holy of Holies, to the heavens. When we open the curtain and Christ comes out, as the Holy Cup, we open the gate of Heaven... and we enter, the sinners.

As we enter the church, during the Divine Liturgy, we climb to the New Jerusalem from above.

Do you understand what a great thing this is? That our souls live... And we will sit at the right of the Father!

And we gain honor, from the honor of our Christ and from the Holy Body of our Lord and God.

Therefore, when we enter the church, we travel the distance from earth to heaven

and we go beyond the stars. We leave the angels behind us and we climb where the Holy Trinity is! This is the meaning of “mystery”!

We see bread and wine, but which of us doesn't believe that this is Christ? We see something else, we smell something else. This is the wine. This is bread. But no! It is Christ!

The same mystery happens here too!

What do we see? That we stand before the icons, down, under the chandeliers, one next to each other. That's wrong! It is a mystery! We are not “here”, we are up “there”!

And there we are all together. Together with... the hosts of saints. Together with the hosts of angels, the Seraphim with six wings, who fly so fast in order to teach us to run to Christ, day and night! Together with the cherubim, those with many eyes, who teach our eyes to discover Christ! This is the mystery of our Church! +

The Soul's Dilemma

The soul has to make a choice, and the outcome will either break it into pieces or enable it to sail to its destination in God. And the choice comes down to this: *Will the soul accept or reject suffering?* Will it make this suffering its own, or struggle against it, seeing it as something alien to itself?

If he chooses to accept his suffering, he must embrace it with the wholeness of his life; he must discover and accept the proper relation to his suffering. If he can do this, he will have transformed his suffering so that in the end his only reality will be God. But if he continues to resist his suffering, refusing to find his salvation in it, his anguish will continue unabated.

The question is ultimately this: *Will he offer himself as a voluntary sacrifice to the will of God?* He must accept as his own will, as his own desire, the will of God for his life. If this happens, he will cease being anxious about his sufferings, for he will see that they too are the signs and tokens of God's presence.

It follows from this that the [soul's] salvation hinges on a single decision, namely, the acceptance or rejection of his suffering. To the extent that he struggles against his suffering, seeking to disown and reject it, his agony will only intensify. The avoidance of suffering serves only to increase suffering in a vicious cycle that never ends.

If, on the other hand, he chooses to entrust himself to God, and so recognize in his suffering God's mercy and love; if he is able to see his suffering as proof of God's love for him, then he will undergo another, greater experience that will shake him to the core of his being.

Just when he thinks his life is about to end, that he is about to breathe his last, he will feel, not simply an upward surge into new life, but deep within himself the presence of the "*long-lived seed*" mentioned in the Prophet Isaiah:

"It was the will of the Lord to bruise him; He has put him to grief; yet when he makes himself an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring, a long-lived seed, and the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand; he shall see the fruit of his suffering of his soul and be satisfied" (Isaiah 53:10).

Spiritual health is not found in the avoidance of suffering, but in its joyful acceptance. The [soul's] dilemma lies precisely in whether or not he will accept his sufferings or reject them, which is another way of saying that the choice he needs to make is whether to accept or deny God.†

-PSALMS AND THE LIFE OF FAITH, P. 100-102.

Magnificent Hearts

The first element of the spiritual life is a sacramental and mystical experience of Christ. Through the sacraments, and by our efforts to call upon Him mystically, we are united to Christ.

The second element of spiritual life [is] the spirit of martyrdom. *Does this mean our life should be a martyrdom, with tears, misery?* Not in the slightest.

Christian life is a song of joy. Christian life is a celebration. But it's also a life of heroism. A life of martyrdom is a happy life, but also an heroic one.

The spirit of martyrdom is evident in asceticism, which is a voluntary acceptance of toil and pain. Most ascetics, having loved Christ from their youth, sought to sacrifice themselves, and give their life to God, for whom their soul was yearning. Often, they shut themselves up within caves, without eating or drinking. They left such places infrequently, only to go the church, and, after that, to take some nourishment. Others slept for only a few hours. Others wore hair-shirts under their garments. Others placed chains about themselves. They lived with deprivations.

Today, such things may seem to be simply legends, or misinterpretations of the spirit of the Gospel. But don't you think they give witness to an obvious heroism, an enviable greatness, a hidden depth, a height inconceivable? By means of these things, the saints transcend nature, they conquered the passions, they eliminated sinful impulses, they trampled on the devil, they acquired ardent love, they gained inner freedom, and by their angelic way of life, they became shining lights to all mankind and to all generations.

These are the things that were done by

these saints, who had such magnificent hearts. *But what about us?* What must we do to have such a spirit of martyrdom? Where, in what aspects of our life, are we to show forth our heroism?

First and foremost, when we are confronted by life's sorrows, by pain, by obstacles, failures, and by all the tempests of life, in these difficult moments, let us say, "*Glory to You, O God.*" With these words, you show that you are a martyr for Christ, that you accept with joy the pain that you encounter.

Second, you show your heroism when you understand that the Christian life requires a struggle, and that great sacrifices are necessary in order to cut off the impulses of your passions, your weaknesses, and your sins.

When your Christian life begins to be difficult, when it seems like an intolerable cross, then you must stand steady as a rock. That is when you are a martyr. Stand fast, steady and unmoving. If you endure, the storm will pass, and you will emerge into the calm; your life will become a celebration, a feast day.

After this trial, after taking up your cross, the flames of divine love will be ignited within you, and you will acquire the most beautiful, the most powerful,

the purest, most angelic love, the love of God.

Third, be a martyr in the struggle against your doubts, your hesitations, your imaginings, your sinful thoughts. As you are sitting there, a thought may enter your head: *What if there is no God?* What if everything is a lie, as empty as the air? What if there is no such thing as the soul? What if Christianity is wrong? What if I'm stupid? At such times, take up the cross of your doubts and thoughts.

Fourth, show your martyr's spirit in the daily arena of your life, in your home, with your husband, with your wife. When your husband comes home tired from work, and speaks to you without being polite, don't get angry. If he swears at you, don't answer him back. Show him love, tolerance, patience. If your wife has burnt the food, don't shout at her; eat it... and tell her it's fine. Let love reign in the house.

When you see that your spouse has wronged you, don't start shouting about how much you're in the right. It doesn't matter if you're in the right or not. It doesn't matter what is correct, but what the other person wants. Get out of the way. Deny yourself. Put the other person first. This is death, this is martyrdom.

Fifth, in our social interactions, we

should likewise be people who deny themselves. We should give ourselves to others. Oh, my dear friends, all the people around you, in your home and outside it as well, need you. Everyone around us, poor and rich, small and great, need us. Let our life be characterized by loving care, tenderness, and compassion. Let us live close to others, and for others.

Sixth, let us be ready, if necessary, to shed our blood for Christ and for our fellow man. Let us be ready to sacrifice ourselves. At the very least, we must deny ourselves something, give something up for Him. We must suffer, we must embrace suffering for Christ.

Seek after Christ! The spiritual life should be marked by the intensity of seeking for Christ. We must constantly think of Him and seek Him, and then we will know joy. If we seek Him, we will find Him, and our life will be filled with gladness.

Many things in our life hide Christ from our view, and we are distracted and absorbed by many concerns, and thus we are not able to have Him constantly before us. Conditions are difficult. But the spiritual life is a battle in which we must never take our eyes off God. We must always seek out our Leader.

Do you want to know how much your

life costs, how much it's worth? Its value is equal to your thirst for Christ; as much as your heart belongs to Christ, that's how much it's worth. +

-THE CHURCH AT PRAYER, P. 122-127.

Feel Him in your heart

Do you see the heights which the saints attain? But how do they do this? What do they do to arrive at such greatness? In the first place, they are perfectly indifferent to things in the world. Nothing interests them. [They] never deviate from their purpose. They are attached to nothing in the world. They love nothing in the world.

They await only Christ. And He purifies them; he purifies their heart. He illumines their souls and grants them the vision of God. God appears before their very eyes: "*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God*" (Matthew 5:8). The saints see God.

After purification and illumination, God grants them freedom from passions. No rage or anger or envy or distress or worry or indignation! No passion whatever! Freedom! And as their soul becomes radiant, it becomes a vessel fit to contain God.

And then Christ enters within them and they are mystically united. When this mystical union takes place, when the saint has seen Christ, when he has

rejoiced in Him, understood Him, come to know Him, enjoyed Him, then he is filled with divine love.

The saints are heavenly human beings. They communicate with Christ and are united with Him in different ways, but especially through unceasing prayer. *"My Christ,"* they say to Him constantly, *"come into my heart - my Lord, my Jesus, my Christ - come and dwell in me."* And Christ comes and dwells mystically in their hearts.

And we, what should we do? [Our] life is burdened with a thousand worries. But seeing what the saints of our Church have done, let us at least do the few small things of which we are capable. Christ accepts the hundred, the thirty, and the five which you will give Him.

Don't make requests about your job, about your mother, about your illness, about success. No. Ask Him to enter your heart. Call upon Him even twice a day, after a month you will be sweetened, you will seek Him ten times, then twenty times, and then you will begin to feel Him in your heart.†

-THE CHURCH AT PRAYER, P. 120-121.

Spiritual Life is Sacramental Living

For those of us who want to be living hearts, on fire with higher ideals, what are the principles that should govern our spiritual life?

First and foremost, for us to be spiritual people, for our lives to be true, we must live a sacramental and mystical way of life. No one acquires the gift of the spiritual life by his own efforts, try though he may. No matter how much I struggle, I'm not going to create a spiritual life myself. Even if I exhaust myself trying, if I toil and weep, or undertake long fasts, the spiritual life is a gift granted to me by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 2:8-10).

It follows, then, that a basic condition for the spiritual life is that we should understand that, on our own, we can do absolutely nothing. No matter how hard we try, the spiritual life is something that someone else gives us. And this "someone else" is the Spirit of God, the Comforter, the *"treasury of good things and the giver of life,"* the treasury from which all the riches of spirituality come forth, the source from which the spiritual life emerges and overflows.

A spiritual person, a true Christian, is someone whose entire life is sworn to God. Initially, by means of his baptism, and later, in his heart, such a person swears and oath to God, to live for God, and to remain with God forever. A spiritual person is an athlete who has burst into life and runs with all the speed of his soul to heaven. A spiritual person is one who, with shining eyes and

a chest thrust forward, has set his course and races to heaven. A spiritual person knows that, in order to succeed, he needs strong wings: the wings of the Holy Spirit. A spiritual person must, therefore, do everything possible to attract, to win over, the Spirit of God, because only the Holy Spirit, God Himself, has the gifts of the spiritual life.

According to Saint Gregory of Nyssa, the "*distribution of the royal gifts*" of the Holy Spirit takes place in the Church through the sacraments. The first sacrament is baptism, followed by chrismation. After this, there is confession, a sacrament which cleanses our hearts from sins. After this is Holy Communion. Just as when the Holy Spirit overshadowed the All-Holy Virgin (Luke 1:35), and the Word of God descended and was made flesh in her womb, so too does the Spirit come into our soul, so that Christ might be born within us, so that we may become personally acquainted with, and make the Holy Spirit our own; so that the life of Christ can become our life. And this is precisely what happens in the sacraments. Without these, there is no Christian life.

As we receive Christ in baptism and chrismation, so too in Holy Communion. That tiny morsel you receive, which you put into your mouth

and barely feel, is the whole Christ, the whole Trinity, together with the Church of Christ, and all the saints. This is Holy Communion. You have a bowl full of flour, you add a little yeast to it, and all the flour is leavened (Galatians 5:9). You receive a little morsel of Holy Communion, and you are immediately leavened; although you are a human being, you become what the Holy Communion is: God! And this is why early Christians partook of it every day (Acts 2:46).

We can say, then, that a sacramental way of life means sacramental union with Christ, participation in the life of the Church by means of the mysteries, mystical experience, mystical union with Christ. +

-THE CHURCH AT PRAYER, P. 116-118.

Exile

When is it, then, that a soul says: "I must live a Christian life, I must live differently?" When it acquires the sense that it is a soul in exile; when it realizes that it is something that has been cast away, and now exists outside of its proper place, outside of paradise, in a foreign land, beyond the borders within which it was made to dwell. That's what "exiled" means. And when the soul becomes conscious of this, and remembers its place of origin, then it can say: *"I must return to my home."* +

- THE WAY OF THE SPIRIT, P. 2

A Pelican in the Wilderness

Is God absent or present? Is He near at hand, or remote and withdrawn? It's a matter of how you look at it. When the soul looks at reality solely through its pain and suffering, it does not see things clearly, and thus it thinks that Christ and His voluntary sufferings are something abstract, distant, and without real meaning. But when the soul alters its perspective, its inner sense and experience of things will begin to change, and so too the way it confronts and responds to its own sufferings, and then it will see that Christ is very close indeed. When we enter the place of hope and trust, we see that God is near, and acknowledge Him as our Lord.

Will [the soul] accept growth, change, and consequently redemption?

Redemption follows upon the experience and acceptance of death. The moment we accept death, true life can begin. Only by means of death can one "*trample down death,*" and so attain to resurrection. Thus, depending on how the [soul] confronts the problem of suffering, God will either be his savior or his executioner.

Again, the secret to his freedom does not lie in the rejection of his sufferings, but in his joyful acceptance of them. He will be truly free only when he lets go of wanting to be free from his sufferings, for all freedom and all life depend on

our being in right relation to God.

When he accepts his death; when he allows himself to hear the sound of his footsteps descending into the grave, he will find that death no longer has a hold on him, for now he is with God. The darkness will vanish, and he will see only light. By struggling to find the right relation to suffering, to our own death, we shall simultaneously find God.

[The soul] must make the difficult decision to sacrifice himself voluntarily to God. If he accepts to become an instrument of God's will, he will emerge triumphant; but otherwise he will fail. His suffering is beyond his control, it is not something he willed for himself, but all things begin and end with God, and nothing takes place apart from the divine will, and so he must see himself as an instrument wielded by God.

As we've said, in accepting or rejecting my suffering, I am accepting or rejecting God Himself. In the beginning, God and I are separate, in such a way that my self, my narrow self-concern, leaves no room for God. If "I" exist, God cannot exist, for there cannot be two Gods, and so it is either God or the self.

When someone sees only his own suffering, God cannot answer him, for it is precisely the mistaken, negative attitude toward suffering that constitutes

the separation between him and God. But if "I" cease to exist, if my relation to my suffering changes, then I can be united to God. This union depends on the denial of myself, so that God can come into my life.

I must learn to accept suffering with joy, to find joy within my suffering, to realize that even in my moments of glory, I am nothing but "*dust and ashes*" (Genesis 18:27); a "*pelican in the wilderness*" (Psalm 101:7 LXX), lost in a desert land, seeking shelter in a landscape of ruins. I must realize my sinfulness, my nakedness, my alienation from God; I must realize that I am "*like a sparrow alone on a housetop*" (Psalm 101:8 LXX), not because I have some psychological problem, but because I have been separated from God.

I need to experience both my exile and my union with God. I need to experience my inner darkness in order to know that God is my life and my light, that He is my salvation. I need to realize that I am in hell, in prison, in solitary confinement, alone on an island dying of leprosy, in order to enter the kingdom of heaven, both in this life and in the one to come.

My soul must cry out, just as the souls of all the saints have cried out, and then my soul will be saved, suffering together with Christ. If I exert myself and

commit myself to the struggles of the spiritual life, then I shall have the right to ask for the understanding of the Spirit. Either way, I'm going to suffer. But it's up to me to decide whether I'm going to be a wounded deer panting for water and never finding any (Psalm 41:1, Proverbs 7:22), or a lamb sacrificed together with Christ, and calling out to Him. In this cry, this calling out, there exists the hope that I will hear the sound of His footsteps, and that these will overtake my own and lead me to salvation. But even before I cry out, God will answer me and say, "*I am here*" (Isaiah 58:9). +

-PSALMS AND THE LIFE OF FAITH, P. 103-106, 108-109.

The Liturgy is our family

'The Liturgy is our family, and our family is not simply our children and relatives - it is rather all of us, all humanity'

The Divine Liturgy is truly a gift of the Holy Spirit to humanity. It is an initiation into the mysteries of the Spirit, a mode of the revelation of God and of all things heavenly. There is nothing in the Liturgy which is not revelatory of the Godhead and of the energies of the Holy Trinity.

Because we know and believe that God is our Father, we view the church, especially when we celebrate the Liturgy, as our true home. We come in and go out freely,

we are happy to be here, we make the sign of the cross, we light our candles, we speak with our friends, and *it is easy to see that the Orthodox feel that the church is their home*. And the church is our home. Our family is the gathering (synaxis) of the church.

Our family is not simply our children and relatives, however many we have. It is rather all of us, all humanity, including all those who have turned aside to the left or to the right, or who have perhaps not yet even thought about God, or dared to admit that their heart is filled with cries and groans, and that, with these, they hope to open heaven, or that God will answer them, but they are hesitant and are ashamed.

The Liturgy is our family, our gathering, our house. *And what a spacious house it is!* Together with us are those who are absent, along with sinners, and the wicked, and the dead, indeed, even those who are in hell, but who may yet remember something about God. And who knows how many of these will find relief, be drawn out of Hades, and even dragged up from the depths of hell, thanks to the prayers of the Church, her memorial services, and divine liturgies. This is our home. We believers have such a large house! +

-THE CHURCH AT PRAYER, PP. 83-4.

Real Hope

In this life, there is no hope. *Does this mean, then, that we are condemned to a life of hopelessness?* No. The experience of hopelessness is but the first step that one reaches on the ladder of spiritual life: a sense of hopelessness in oneself and in all things of the world.

I arrive at a state in which I am a stranger to all hope. I am alone without moorings, without a ray of hope, with no light to lead me to any kind of safe harbor. The only thing that exists for me is God. This kind of hopelessness is not the expression of a psychological problem or even a sign of human weakness. It is something positive and beneficial, since this kind of hopelessness is, in fact, hope in God, just as dispassion is an intense passion for God.

And so, hopelessness is the complete surrender of myself to God. hopelessness pushes me in the direction of God, leading me to union with Him. *This is not hopelessness in the ordinary sense of the word, which is really despair*, and that is the greatest sin.

Despair leads to nothing, creates nothing, sustains nothing. It's like being locked in a vicious cycle of sin, habituated into some pattern of behavior that you can't seem to shake despite all your efforts, and so you stop

struggling because you say it's hopeless. *That is not the kind of hopelessness we're talking about here.* That's the devil talking, and the confused thoughts of a soul disfigured by the passions.

True hopelessness is a continual emptying of the self so that it might be filled by God. True hopelessness is something dynamic, something which advances and progresses, just like faith. It is not something static. True hopelessness is continual knowledge of the self that produces continual knowledge of God. Hopelessness is the feeling that everything around you is false, unreal, illusory, and so it makes you want to clutch onto something for support. Some people will grasp onto their ego, their sense of self, or their reputation, or their wealth, or their education. Others will grasp onto God. And this grasping begins from the moment you yourself are grasped by God and find hope in Him. Then it will become evident to you that the loss of hope, the experience of hopelessness, is in fact a gift from God. †

-PSALMS AND THE LIFE OF FAITH, P. 320-321.

In a Taxi

Once, when I was in a hurry to come here to the monastery to speak to you, I took a taxi, so I wouldn't be late. On the way, I asked the driver: *"Tell me, do you ever get to eat lunch or dinner with your wife?"*

You know what sort of work these drivers have, and how they almost never know when they are going home.

"Every day" he told me, "both lunch and dinner."

"How do you manage it? What time do you eat?"

[He replied] *"Lunch starts from 10:00 in the morning, and goes till 4:00 in the afternoon, and dinner is from 6:00, often till 2:00 in the morning."*

Do you understand? At 10:00 in the morning, his wife had the meal ready and waited for him, whatever time he arrived so that they could eat together. And in the evening, she waited for him from 6:00, often till 2:00 in the morning.

Doesn't this impress you? This is what martyrdom in life means: a life of love!†

-THE CHURCH AT PRAYER, P. 160